European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

Mass culture and the defence of national traditions:
the B.B.C. and American broadcasting, 1922-1954

Valeria Camporesi

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of a
Doctor of the European University Institute

Members of Jury:
Prof. Tiziano Bonazzi (University of Bologna)
Prof. Arthur Marwick (Open University)
Prof. Alan S. Milward (London School of Economics and EUI), supervisor
Prof. Daniel Roche (EUI)
Mass culture and the defence of national traditions:
the B.B.C. and American broadcasting, 1922-1954

Valeria Camporesi

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of a Doctor of the European University Institute

Members of Jury:

Prof. Tiziano Bonazzi (University of Bologna)
Prof. Arthur Marwick (Open University)
Prof. Alan S. Milward (London School of Economics and EUI), supervisor
Prof. Daniel Roche (EUI)
CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Part One

BRITISH VS. AMERICAN APPROACHES TO A "PUBLIC SERVICE" IN BROADCASTING

1. The Invention of the B.B.C.: the American Model Conceptualized and Rejected, 1919-1939 11
   1.1 The Perception of the "American Chaos" and the Birth of Broadcasting in Britain, 1922-1927 11
   1.2 Broadcasting and the Business World in the 1920s 21
   1.3 Monopoly and licence System under Threat: the 1930s 24
   1.4 The Broadcasters 34
   1.5 "We Talk a Different Language": the Un-Americanness of the B.B.C. 40

   2.1 Questioning the Quality of B.B.C. Programmes 44
   2.2 The B.B.C. Monopoly and International Broadcasting 50
   2.3 A British Commercial Broadcasting Service 55
   2.4 Lost Threads: Towards the 1948 Broadcasting Committee 60
   2.5 Reactions of the B.B.C. 69
   2.6 B.B.C. Monopoly in Sound Broadcasting Confirmed 76
   2.7 The British Way to Commercial Television 79

3. Attitudes Towards Audience Research, 1930s-1950s 92
   3.1 Giving the Public What We Think They Need, And Not What They Want: Before 1936 93
3.2 "Counting Heads": After 1936
3.3 Paternalism and Chaos: an Attempt at a General Evaluation

Part Two

THE DISCOVERY OF NATIONAL TRADITIONS OF INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

4. Before the war
4.1 The Pre-history of Transatlantic Broadcasting
4.2 Discovering America: The Parody and the Real Thing, the 1930s
4.3 Communicating between Time Zones: "Five Hours Back"
4.4 The North American Representative, 1936
4.5 Importing Ideas from the U.S.A. in the Late 1930s
4.6 Resisting "Americanization"

5. American Material in the B.B.C. Output: the War and After
5.1 The B.B.C. at War: Domestic and International Dimensions of Growth
5.2 The Birth of Anglo-American Broadcasting, 1940-43
5.3 "Programme Infiltration"
5.4 The American Forces Network and the Return to Defensiveness, 1944
5.5 After the War

6. Being British. The "B.B.C. Style" through the Test of Time, 1922-1950s
6.1 - An Overview of the B.B.C.'s Policy Towards American Interferences
6.2 - Exploring Indicators of Britishness

Conclusion
Notes
Bibliography and Sources
"In practice it can now be said that the B.B.C. has acquired the same historic character in Britain as the Standing Army - which, since the time of Cromwell, has been theoretically at the mercy of the annual passage by Parliament of the Army Act. Just as nobody seriously imagines that the Army would be disbanded, so it would be assumed by most people that the periodic review of broadcasting in Britain will not lead to the abolition of the B.B.C." (1)

Many things seem to have changed since 1966, when Hugh Greene, then Director General of the B.B.C., pronounced these words in a public address on the organization of broadcasting. If his description might sound exceedingly triumphal for the political situation prevailing in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, however, it does effectively summarize in a short sentence the history of the first sixty years of broadcasting in Britain, from the very birth of the British Broadcasting Company in 1922, through the introduction of commercial television in 1954, to the 1960s and 1970s. (2)

Like the Standing Army, such an outstanding monument to the most notable qualities of the nation was founded upon an almost universal consensus at home over its nature and existence and the setting up of clearly defined national boundaries. Not only it can be said to have fought a real battle against Britain's foreign enemies abroad during World War 2. But also at home the broadcasting service in Britain was built around the legitimizing notion of the defence of the national culture and customs. This image derived its strength from a powerful vision of the role of the cultural élites within British society (well grounded in established social and cultural traditions such as the idea of "service") (3) against, or in the face of, menacing external influences. (4)

Hence it is not surprising that, in the political and professional discourse which accompanied the emergence and development of British broadcasting (and of a media policy) (5) the references to what was happening in the United States
were a popular exercise. Indeed the obsessive recurrence of the theme of a
supposed, either threatened or, less often, called for, American influence, and
the parallel, continuous reaffirmation of the U.S. experience as an universal
model could be described as the single most outstanding feature of the British
debate on the subject. It is even less surprising when one considers the great
events which loomed up to form its overall historical background. During the same
decades of its gradual emergence as a world power as a substitute for Britain
(which history textbooks date back to the 1920s) America, through the medium of
its products, had become a feature of everyday life in Europe and certainly in
the British Isles. This process, sometimes called Americanization, or American
influence, or American impact, originated, or encouraged, on the part of the
European élites, various types of reactions (from censorship and straightforward
cultural protectionism to filtering processes). (6) Broadcasting constituted a
particularly sensitive field from this point of view: apart from the possibility
of exchanges of programmes, ideas and artists, radio programmes could easily be
transmitted beyond national boundaries. In fact, the international vocation of
radio could only be restrained by means of political and economic agreements
purposefully agreed upon and enforced by national governments (the kind of
agreements which are now being considered to deal with the perturbing
consequences of satellite television). (7) But broadcasting, and the American
model to organize it, could menace British established conventions also under
another respect. The irruption of mass culture, if not orderly controlled, might
mislead those who were at that very moment requested to act as responsible
citizens. It might deprive them of their very identity. It might weaken the
political and cultural foundations of democracy, as it was conceived in Britain.
It was, once more, a matter for careful public consideration. It was, once more,
a sensitive issue not to be governed by powerful foreign examples.

The distant processes under way in world and home politics might then
provide for a meaningful framework and explain at least the most self-conscious
elaborations on the theme of the American model of broadcasting. They must also have had something to do with the sheer dimension of the production on the subject. Any history of the B.B.C. at any point of its development can hardly ignore those repeated, explicit, abundant statements, reports, warnings and memoranda. (8) All these sources however would hardly constitute a firm ground of research. The British obsession with what was going on in U.S. radio, with its reverberations in the United Kingdom and domestic institutional developments, cannot be taken at its face value. Its relationship with the facts and realities of Americanization is not as clear as even many of the most recent contributions on the subject seem to have implied. (9) As a matter of fact, this research grew out of a dissatisfaction with the results of historical inquiries on Americanization, a term which seems still in need of a satisfactory definition and whose effectiveness in historical and cultural analysis remains to be assessed. (10)

If the precise meanings of the British obsession with America are still far from clear, its hold upon the British mind was nevertheless very strong all through the twentieth century. Its development and ambiguities constitute a long standing case in the history of cultural protectionism which might be worth a more thorough examination. Given its apparent, vague relationships with some wider political problems, related on one side to the defence of Britain as a world power and on the other to the defence of its established national traditions, the first question to be asked should concern the degree of "manipulation", of imposition coming from outside of the broadcasting world which it entailed. Two hypotheses might be advanced to deal with that question, pointing at two directions of research. The first one is the assumption that the notion of America as a model (to be either imitated or, more frequently, rejected) and a powerful competitor belonged, as a side product of a shade of cultural nationalism, to the political discourse. (11) The B.B.C. staff was
strongly affected by those myths (the Corporation indeed belonged, at one level, to the world of politics and shared the basic tenets of its discourse). Having to talk the language of politics to obtain the periodical renewal of their charter and to secure a suitable financial support, the B.B.C. officials could be considered part of a process of manipulation whose raison d'etre would be the building up of an external counter-model to legitimize the national institution. As "an instrument of social control" the B.B.C. indeed "fostered a feeling of communal identity among [its] dispersed audiences and linked them to the symbolic heartland of national life." (12) The question however remains open whether the propagation of a collective identity was simply a process of "state-linked manipulation by the dominant power group" (13) (which would thus assimilate the broadcasters to the politicians) or rather whether the B.B.C. was thus acting, at least partially, in accordance with the peculiarities of the medium. (14) The second hypothesis could then be that the opposition to U.S. influence in radio grew out of an inherent nationalist component of broadcasting. (15)

To answer these questions the professionals' attitudes towards American broadcasting and the influence it exercised upon British programmes must be carefully examined. (16) An analysis of the actual policies and procedures of the broadcasting service allows us to supplement the notion of the juxtaposition to the U.S. experience with the idea of the degree of its influence upon the B.B.C. output. Particular care must be taken, however, to distinguish between what could be defined as American and what was simply the result of the specific functioning of the new medium. (17) Under this regard, the most remarkable characteristic of radio is the extent of its tendentially classless, nationwide audience. This was indeed the major "technical" problem the broadcasters had to deal with. Ideological commitments and desires to please the political world had to pass through the test of an increase or maintenance of listening rates. Here the reasoning leads directly to the thorny problem of the relationship between the broadcasters and their audience. To what extent did the sentiments of
communal identity raised by the B.B.C. suit "the deeply felt psychological needs of its audience"? (18) Is there a further element of "manipulation" implicit in the professionals' view of the intrinsic qualities of the medium? As the trend prevailing in recent works on communication studies seem to indicate, (19) the question of how mass media exercise their influence over a public opinion which in turn also influences them can hardly be avoided any more. If no conclusive image might eventually emerge from this work on this particularly crucial problem, an attempt will be pursued to take it into the picture. The scene will open on what could easily be recognized as a manufactured stage (part I of this study deals with the political and institutional aspect of the contrast between British and American broadcasting) but the focus will soon be moved insofar as this will prove possible to the streets outside the theatre (part II attempts to measure and describe the degree and nature of the process of Americanization of programmes and projects it against the broadcasters' discourse).

Those notions of an American model in broadcasting as an "agent in modern political discourse" (20) and as a reflection of the broadcasters' interpretation of their audience are here immersed in a specific historical process. Both part I and II are articulated in two sections divided up by the war years. The concluding chapters of both parts (chapter 3 and 6, respectively), dealing with both periods, represent an attempt in the direction of a more general conclusion on the themes specifically dealt with in the two sections. The chronology of this work (covering the years between 1922, when the British Broadcasting Company was set up, and 1954, when the Corporation monopoly was broken up) should indeed serve two purposes. On one side, it is meant to describe the historical peculiarities which accompanied the whole history of sound broadcasting in Britain before the advent of television as a mass medium. On the other it should attempt to contribute and clarify the puzzle of the British national identity and assess the extent of its dependence upon specific historical circumstances. In other words to really grasp the meaning and actual
substance of the policies of cultural protectionism set up by the B.B.C. a crucial question to be asked is to what extent British reactions were the products of a comparatively less developed economy and society on the face of the most dynamic competitor which was progressively conquering its dominant position. A diachronic analysis comparing the terms of the contrast before and after 1940-45 may in this sense clarify the extent of the contribution of this third condition to the question posed over the substantiality of the notion of national identity as it recurs in the history of British broadcasting. Such a time scope, while assessing the effects of the war and of the emergence of mass consumption in Britain, would allow us to define whether and how the national defences set up in the 1920s and 1930s were adapted to the more dynamic, self-conscious and popular service of the early 1950s. If the reasoning is carried to its logical conclusions, then, the comparison between the two periods might even lead to pronounce a tentative conclusion on the wide, almost exaggerated assumption which looms large in any pronouncements on European reactions to America: the question whether (and to what extent) U.S. experience should be read as an universal lesson of modernity. (21)
PART ONE.

BRITISH VS. AMERICAN APPROACHES TO A "PUBLIC SERVICE" IN BROADCASTING
Chapter 1.

THE INVENTION OF THE B.B.C.:

THE AMERICAN MODEL CONCEPTUALIZED AND REJECTED, 1919-1939

"What ... shall we say of the English system - first as regards its bearing on national education and the standard of national culture, and second as regards its bearing on political democracy and that system of freedom of discussion which is the heart and core of democracy?" (22)

1.1 - The Perception of the 'American Chaos' and the Birth of Broadcasting in Britain, 1922-1927

Wireless communications developed as a branch of wireless telephony at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1914, "the commercial possibilities of valves were being realized and research was beginning to be directed towards those commercial possibilities." (23) A British enterprise, the Marconi company, at that time had the technical lead in radio communications. The outbreak of the Great War however prevented the unchecked commercial exploitation of the new means of communication in Britain. Given the state of emergency, the political and military authorities took advantage of their constitutional rule over airwaves (the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1904 had given the Post Office complete control of wireless communications). "Up to about 1920 ... the development of valves had largely occurred non-commercially, although this was more true [in Britain] ... than in America, where the needs of war did not result in such a complete cessation of activities not directly related to the war effort." (24) When the question of the setting up of a broadcasting service for entertainment purposes was brought forward by the manufacturers of radio sets after 1918, it was by that time already apt to be affected by political and strategic considerations. "Our authorities, unlike the American
authorities, had the constitutional right to refuse permissions to set up stations," (25) Peter Eckersley, the first Chief Engineer of the B.B.C., recalled in the early 1940s, exaggerating the differences between the two approaches. Indeed, the real difference between the attitudes prevailing in the two countries lay not so much in constitutional provisions, as Eckersley claims here, as in the fact that the British authorities soon decided to exercise their rights as fully as possible. (26)

It was in fact an Imperial Wireless Telegraphy Committee which in 1919-1920 discussed the first broadcasting policy plans. Its members were politicians, Naval officers and civil servants. (27) The Committee, whose report was presented to Parliament in June 1920, pronounced itself against public monopoly of broadcasting and envisaged a plan of controlled competition between a publicly supported public service and an oligopoly of privately owned stations. (28) Less than three years later, the twenty-four companies which had shown an interest in the launching of a broadcasting service were forced into a single society to which complete monopoly of the use of radio for entertainment purposes was granted.

These two facts are not as inconsistent as it would seem. The Committee itself had been called to work upon two apparently conflicting principles. First of all a constructive answer was due to a new important industrial group whose vitality and technical importance deserved the most careful attention on the part of a responsible national élite and to the public curiosity towards the fascinating invention. The strict control of wireless which the war had encouraged had to be reviewed and adapted to the new circumstances. In 1920-1921, then, while the manufacturers of radio sets were involved in the discussions with governmental committees, amateur stations, too, were allowed to develop. They in fact "speeded the arrival of public broadcasting by their experiment and development in telephony." (29) However, and this was the second but equally important point to assert, it had to be stated clearly and
irrevocably that no regular transmission in whatever form would go on the air before the government had decided upon the allocation of wavelengths. The idea, which did not change substantially thereafter, was that an original set of rules was required to properly provide for this new means of communication; the approach implied that broadcasting could not be left to the free deployment of private initiative. The discussion on broadcasting was born as a political issue which government and parliament would have to legislate upon, regulate, encourage, even declare to be independent. The whole process called for an extraordinary effort on the part of the political, bureaucratic and military élites to work out an acceptable solution to the request of a broadcasting service. At the political cultural level the question of the limitation of resources (wavelengths and economic resources) and the principle that the state had the right to decide upon the allocation of its scarce resources prevented the unchecked establishment of a broadcasting service before a political decision had been reached. This seems to be the main conclusion which can be drawn from the report of the Imperial Wireless Telegraphy Committee and the elaborations which preceded the establishment of the British Broadcasting Company. Very soon, the policy of control would become an unquestionable priority (as will be shown by the decisions reached by the Wireless Subcommittee of the Imperial Telegraph Committee which took up the discussion on broadcasting after 1920). Its antecedents however were already there when the emphasis seemed to be put on cautious liberalization. What is remarkable about all this is not the liberalizing approach, but the fact that from the very beginning in Britain hardly anybody, except for a decided minority, ever thought of simply letting things go; all the more remarkable when compared with what was happening in America.

Comparisons with the United States were indeed by then a most popular exercise. It was between 1920 and 1922 that American broadcasting became a common reference point for politicians in search of new ideas and models of
organization. The suspicious creativity which characterizes the early years of broadcasting in Britain derived important sources of inspiration from abroad. U.S. broadcasting was then the most developed in the world. It provided therefore an almost unique opportunity to see the future at work. The Imperial Wireless Committee had examined a report on the developments of broadcasting in France and the United States. From then on, America was to play the role of a counterfactual repertory; everybody had to look at, to talk about radio entertainment. At the political-cultural level, therefore, the American experience of regulation (or lack of regulation) was examined in order to judge the goods and evils of a commercial broadcasting service.

A few years before radio programmes were allowed on British air, between 1919 and 1920, in the United States broadcasting had established itself almost abruptly and in a rather casual way. During the war the big companies had acquired complete control of the principal patents to manufacture radio sets. In mid-1919 the ban on amateur transmissions was lifted and almost immediately sales rocketed. (30) Very soon, small private investors (department stores, educational organizations, religious denominations, newspapers etc.) with the radio amateurs’ help were able to buy and operate comparatively cheap radio stations, which they used as very primitive, local advertising media. In an incredibly short span of time the number of stations transmitting and interfering with each other increased dramatically. Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, though a staunch supporter of private initiative, was forced to call a national conference on radio to discuss with private investors and manufacturers the ‘chaos of the air’ which American enthusiasm for radio potentialities had brought about. (31)

Apart from its domestic implications, the 1922 Radio Conference constituted an important point of reference in the history of British broadcasting, too. Among the American businessmen and government representatives who crowded the Washington meeting (held on 27 January 1922), an observer was
sent by the British Post Office to see whether something could be learnt from the American experience. F. J. Brown, Post Office assistant secretary who was in charge of broadcasting matters, would later present to the Wireless Sub-Committee of the Imperial Communication Committee a memorandum "dealing with the question of broadcasting in the United States of America" based on what he had heard at the Hoover Conference. (32) As was to be expected, first hand experience of American broadcasting positively confirmed the British radio manufacturers' prophecies: broadcasting could be a very remunerative enterprise (and American investors were taking advantage of it). Very soon, the British government concluded, pressures in favour of the establishment of a broadcasting service in the United Kingdom (exercised directly by U.S. investors or by their English counterparts) would clearly become irresistible. "In view of the great extension of the use of wireless receiving apparatus in America as a result of 'broadcasting'" (to which pressures from radio set manufacturers, amateurs and MPs have to be added) "the whole question of permits for broadcasting and for reception requires consideration", the Committee stated. (33) The idea of the necessity to relax military control over the ether was still strong when Brown reported to the cabinet committee. At this point of the American story, ironically, Hoover's most outstanding message from Washington was the cry for some regulation over the uncontrolled development of broadcasting stations. (34) Faced with the same ambiguity between liberalization and control which was reflected in the 1920 Wireless Committee's Report, Brown took a step forward and proceeded to distinguish between "the emission of recreative programmes", which, he thought, should have been liberalized to encourage the sales of radio sets, and "really important broadcasting services", which "as is proposed in the United States" should be retained in the hands of the Government. (35) By then, the liberal lesson which only a year earlier the United States appeared to be teaching the world was losing appeal. In 1919-1920 it had looked as if the problem was simply to learn from Americans how to relax the strict controls over
receiving licences and the diffusion of broadcasting. Two years later HMG’s emissary began to believe that the United States was urging the United Kingdom to prevent the establishment of chaos. Attention was brought to the fact that even Americans were thinking about reforming their system "to do what we are now doing at the beginning, that is, proceed to lay down very drastic regulations ... for the control of wireless broadcasting." (36) A few months before the issuing of the British Broadcasting Company charter (37) eyes were kept on what was happening in America. Ironically, at a moment when U.S. officials were trying to impose some form of regulations upon their chaotic situation. (38) Developments in progress in the United States in the early 1920s seemed then to encourage government intervention, either to protect and encourage the national industries or to prevent uncontrolled and chaotic developments.

The British enthusiasm for order and regulation, however, greatly surpassed the original American inspiration. Very soon civil servants and politicians charged with the setting up of a broadcasting service in Britain realized that Hoover’s vague recommendations would not be enforced in the United States. The almost unrestrained competition among the stations which had been denounced at the 1922 Radio Conference would therefore go on as before along with what they had been convinced to regard as an unbearable, unfair confusion. Gradually, during the Summer of 1922, in Britain the U.S. system came to be identified with the ‘chaos of the air’ denounced by Hoover. From then on, if the attention towards what was happening in America was kept well alive, it was basically to learn from American errors and contrast their commercial successes more than anything else.

On 18 January 1923 (less than three years after the Imperial Wireless Telegraphy Committee had reported to Parliament but only a few months since the first official meeting between manufacturers and Post Office representatives had been held), a British Broadcasting Company was licensed and the monopoly had
come to be almost universally accepted as the only viable solution to the problem of interferences. (39) The amateurs were excluded from the negotiations and their influence drastically reduced to the request of the British Broadcasting Company subscribers. A protection on the importing of radio sets was also granted, to give the British companies a guaranteed revenue for the years in which they would have to invest in the setting up of a broadcasting service. (40) The whole system was to be financed through licence fees, collected by the Post Office and only partially reallocated to the B.B.C., a system which up to the early 1960s not only did not entail any financial desboursement on the part of the government, but which actually provided it with an income. (41)

Apart from isolated voices, the opposition to the American experience seemed to rally universal support. The British Broadcasting Company was chartered as a private concern financed through licence revenue and operating in a regime of monopoly (but theoretically open to new subscribers). The companies which had put pressure on the government to allow for the starting of a broadcasting service "for entertainment purposes" were forced to cooperate and work together. (42) Competition, either internal or coming from outside the British Isles, was kept by law to a minimum. Broadcasting had come to be viewed as too delicate a matter to be left to the market. All the more so since the "market" (embodied at this stage by the manufacturers of radio sets and the newspapers' proprietors) seemed more interested to keep the whole process under control by previous agreements with the government, than eager to be left free to invest. (43)

The role played by the American experience in the devising of that solution was officially acknowledged a few years later by the Crawford Committee on broadcasting, which reported to Parliament in 1926: "it is agreed," it proclaimed, "that the U.S. system of free and uncontrolled transmission is unsuited to this country, and that broadcasting must accordingly remain a
monopoly - in other words that the whole organisation must be controlled by a single authority." (44) The "Historical Summary of the Broadcasting Service in Great Britain" which some Post Office officials presented to the Crawford Committee explained in greater detail the ideas upon which this refusal was based: "The genesis of broadcasting in Great Britain," it explained, "dates back to the summer of 1922 when, inspired by the popularity it had attained in the United States, some of the principal radio manufacturers of wireless apparatus approached the Post Office for permission to open a service in Great Britain. It was evident, not only on a priori grounds but from the report of American experience, that to avoid mutual interference the number of transmitting stations would have to be strictly limited and subject to effective safeguards against abuse; and a monopoly in efficient hands seemed likely to provide the most successful service." (45) Then, a few days after the parliamentary debate on the Crawford Report, the Economist insisted: "American experience has proved beyond the shadow of doubt that broadcasting must remain a monopoly." (46) A small group of liberal MPs tried to resist the widespread condemnation of the U.S. system of broadcasting and rhetorically appealed to the cultural proximity and the liberal inclinations of the British and American people. (47) Their campaign, however, went largely unheeded.

The next step, the official transformation of the Company into a public corporation on 1 January 1927 was a natural consequence of the decision taken in 1922. (48) In an interview broadcast on B.B.C. Television in the late 1950s, John C. W. Reith himself, the B.B.C. first Director General, acknowledged that 1927 did not change much in the functioning of the broadcasting service in Britain. The British Broadcasting Company," he said, "was in the hands of the Wireless Trade but they had never dominated, abolished a decision or anything of that sort. They had left me virtually full freedom of management, and allowed me to manage the British Broadcasting Company in the interest of broadcasting and of the country. But there was a danger that the next Board of Directors might
not be as broadminded and farseeing, and I felt that it should become a public corporation." (49) In 1927, then, the Board of Governors was introduced whose formal powers were to be defined "in five successive B.B.C. Charters." (50) Its members were broadly defined by the Crawford Committee as "trustees of the national interest in broadcasting." (51) And the Board itself was conceived so as to act, in the politicians' mind, as a representative of public administration and an embodiment of the ideal of public service. Monopoly had been introduced as a solution to the 'chaos of the air' and public support was granted as a result of both rigidity and underdevelopment of the economic world and an underestimation of the economic potentialities of the medium, the organisation in public corporation was seen as the essential device which would synthesize the best qualities of British broadcasting and keep out bad influences. It seemed in fact the perfect solution to the problem of political control and the dangers of authoritarianism once monopoly had been introduced as the only viable, and sensible, solution.

In Britain, then, in opposition to the American conception and practice, public service broadcasting came to be identified, first and foremost, with the organization in public corporation, "an experiment in public ownership and control", as the American new-dealer Lincoln Gordon defined it, (52) a supposedly brilliant synthesis of state control and private enterprise. In the political thought the idea had its roots in the crisis of the liberal tradition and the subsequent establishment within it of a progressive current. (53) It was indeed since the early 1920s that groups of post-war Liberals began to discuss possible alternative institutional solutions to "balancing the public and private domains," the most efficient of which seemed to be the "public corporation on the Port of London Authority model." (54) Soon the innovative proposal gained the support of strands of opinion within the Labour and the Conservative parties thus getting apt to become an established principle. (55) Those who were in favour of the public corporation model of organization
maintained that not only it had clear economic advantages, as it exploited resources more efficiently than any other kind of public or private enterprise, but that it operated in defence of a public interest not strictly identified with the government of the day. (56) When applied to broadcasting it acquired however a peculiar flavour. W. A. Robson, of the New Fabian Research Bureau, one of the best equipped supporters of the public corporation model ("namely, the independent public board operating a socialised service" such as the Forestry Commission, the Central Electricity Board and the London Passenger Transport Board), explained it very clearly: "Broadcasting differs from all the other services," he maintained, "it is an engine of the mind, and carries with it cultural, moral and political implications of the most formidable character." (57) Or, as a much later scholar of British public policy put it: "The wireless demanded for the first time that the state assume some sort of omnibus attitude toward the cultural and political diet of the nation. It was unique in that it had access to the home and to all members of the family, on an universal and instantaneous basis. To this the existing dominant news and opinion medium, the newspapers, offered no real parallel. All manner of questions of cultural control and political presentation were posed by the new technical marvel." (58)

However, the potentialities of broadcasting were far from evident in 1922. The decision then taken to maintain a degree of centralized supervision over the broadcasting of entertainment owed much to a generic desire to keep the new "satanic mill" under control, just because it was new. In 1927, though, its virtual power over public opinion was clear. To those who feared the tyranny of monopoly and public control over a mass communication medium this working model was presented where a trustee of Governors in representation of the whole of society and embodying democracy itself would decide almost independently of political pressures what would suit best the British listener. (59) It was the highest degree of institutionalization of the "paternalistic" broadcasting
system. (60) It implied, then, an adaptation to the new medium of a well-established lib-lab principle: the classical "faith in the power of education," transforming itself from the idea of government by an aristocracy of intelligence to that of an educated democracy.

1.2 - Broadcasting and the Business World in the 1920s

Broadcasting was born in Britain as an independent cultural medium whose scope could only be determined by the state - either as a legitimate owner of the wavelengths or, very soon afterwards, as the custodian of the moral and cultural well being of its citizens. This political attitude, which the B.B.C. mythology describes as typically British, (62) was reinforced by a peculiar organization of the private interests. Up to the break-up of the war, the government repeatedly discussed its broadcasting policies with the main economic interests involved. The new business groups which showed a consistent interest in the setting up of a broadcasting service were restricted in the 1920s to the manufacturers of radio sets. In spite of the technical maturity of the new British industry, the makers of wireless apparatuses in Britain began to seriously envisage the launching of a broadcasting service only comparatively late, the delay being due to the war. This was after their American colleagues had already taken the risk of investments and were getting remarkable returns. In fact, not only politicians and civil servants who had to decide what form to give to the broadcasting service were eagerly looking at American radio developments; the manufacturers of radio sets had also important lessons to learn from the United States (two of the six biggest firms operating in the field in Britain had American connections). More precisely, it was by observing what was going on on the other side of the Atlantic that British entrepreneurs had learnt that broadcasting could be highly profitable. (63) U.S. companies themselves were also putting pressure on the British government to allow the broadcasting of radio entertainment in the hope of establishing a new market for
their receiving sets. (64) Nobody was thinking then, either in Britain or in the United States, of broadcasting as a branch of the entertainment industry. Its economic potentialities as an advertising medium were also far from clear. (65) What was evident was that once a broadcasting service was started people were willing to buy their radio sets by the million. (66) The British manufacturers' top priority was that broadcasting for entertainment purposes should be allowed to start as soon as possible, in almost whatever form the government would choose; (67) provided that politicians would help them in the early stages of their enterprise, namely would be willing to allow for a certain degree of protection in the face of foreign (that is to say, basically American) as well as internal (that is, amateur) competition. That control would be the foremost aim was expressed in rather clear terms. A month before the formation of the British Broadcasting Company, the Director of General Electric, Sir William Noble, was informed by the manufacturing companies that their first recommendation was "that the existing regulations as contained in the Wireless Telegraphy Act governing the control of wireless telegraphy and telephony in this country should not be relaxed more than is absolutely necessary for the purpose of assisting the development of broadcasting on thoroughly scientific lines. It is felt that any general relaxation of the existing regulation ... would tend to lead to chaotic conditions such as obtained in the United States of America during the earlier period of the development of broadcasting in that country." (68) So, as far as foreign competition was concerned, no greater relaxation could be envisaged. At an April 1922 meeting of the Wireless Subcommittee, Colonel Simpson, deputy managing director of Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co. Ltd., declared that "the companies were being hurried by what was happening in the United States. They wished to know as soon as possible what wavelengths would be allotted to them in order that they could start the manufacture of the receiving instruments, otherwise he was afraid that cheap and poor non-selective instruments from abroad would flood the British market."
(69) (As a matter of fact, if a development which lay in the future may be anticipated, in 1935 the Ullswater Committee on broadcasting would criticize the British manufacturers of radio sets for not having been able to produce "a really cheap set for the mass market.") (70) Furthermore, the companies stated, the importation of foreign wireless sets would have taken away from the B.B.C. the financial resources which were to be invested in the new broadcasting service. (71) So they eventually obtained economic protection for some years in exchange for the establishment of a broadcasting service by means of a continuous reference to what was going on in the United States. British entrepreneurs had intercepted the messages coming from the other side of the Ocean and interpreted them to the government basically as an emergency signal. Americans were already far advanced in the new industry, as both politicians and business men had been able to see. If Britain was to maintain its superiority in communications, it was essential to learn swiftly from their doings and be ready to fight against their supremacy.

The version of its plans which the business world presented to the government then confirmed, or anticipated, the politicians' opposition to American broadcasting. It grew out of a lucid awareness of the intrinsic inevitability of an economic competition with the United States and typically dwelt upon the proclaimed necessity to preserve a supposedly higher quality of British products. From now on this menacing image of the United States will repeatedly be evoked by politicians and businessmen alike to justify all different sorts of broadcasting policy plans. The effort to compete with the Americans became a good for all popular cry.

But the private interests' attitude towards broadcasting coincided with the eventual choice made by the government even more deeply. The national press threw in the whole weight of its long established power to prevent the introduction of commercial radio. It did so in defence of its advertising revenues and in utter opposition to broadcasting viewed as a threatening
competitor which would have robbed newspapers of their readership. (72) In fact, the opposition of the press played an important role in impressing a contracted, protectionist element on broadcasting. (73) The comparative underdevelopment of consumer society in Britain in the aftermath of the First World War may have influenced the newspaper proprietors' attitude and therefore shaped the configuration of the private interests involved and the quality of their demands. The market size did not allow for an investment race in broadcasting: in the United States newspapers' revenues came from flourishing but localized markets; the growth of national radio networks seemed then to rely on a different economic source: a new national market for advertising; (74) in Britain, the newspapers' proprietors thought, the demand for advertising space would have remained the same and commercial radio was bound to compete directly and unfairly with the printing press for revenues. (75)

As a further consequence to the perception of an economy with limited resources, all through the 1920s advertising interests did not play any significant role in the discussion on broadcasting policy in Britain, thus keeping to a protracted, most remarkable silence. This contraction probably grew out of the interplay of a widespread attitude, in influential circles, which considered advertising as a sub-cultural degeneration, (76) and of the industry's consciousness of its own economic fragility.

1.3 - Monopoly and Licence System under Threat: the 1930s

However, at the beginning of the 1930s, the situation began to change. The virtually unquestioned consensus over the institutions of broadcasting which had prevailed in the preceding decade seemed then to falter under the blows of a new interest in the potentialities of wireless advertising, on one side, and a multifarious attack on the dangers of a monopolistic control of broadcasting which found its way to the Parliament, the press and cabinet circles on the other. Private entrepreneurs wishing to take advantage of wireless advertising
were growing restless and began to struggle against the limits imposed upon their expansionist urge. Increasingly they were persuaded to sponsor broadcast programmes transmitted in English from continental stations. "What biases the average advertiser in his attitude towards this radio advertising question," a promotional article on radio advertising claimed in 1933, "is his initial incredulity that anyone should listen to a foreign station at all ... the only thing he really does know is that manufacturers in the same line of business as himself are spending large sums of money on this form of selling in the U.S.A." While the old problem of the applicability of U.S. experiences to European settings reappeared ("'Ah, well, America ... It is different there""), a generic feeling that something could still be learnt from it remained strong. After all, developments in progress on the other side of the Ocean were impressive. "Radio advertising in the U.S.A.," concluded the article, "has long ceased to be a sensation or a passing fancy, it has settled down into an unquestionable advertising success." (77) Americans in Britain, furthermore, struggled to convince British businessmen that it was not that different, after all. The biggest advertising agencies operating in the United Kingdom and promoting radio advertising were in fact U.S. firms and reproduced American ways and procedures. "Back in the 1930s," writes Howard Thomas, the organizer of the Commercial Radio Department of the London Press Exchange, "the London offices of the American advertising agencies were among the first to buy time on the Continental stations and they followed the established pattern of American commercial radio, where the advertiser both bought the time and provided the programme." (78)

The success of the commercial stations transmitting in English from the continent strengthened the advertisers' interest. (79) Since the late 1920s-early 1930s, foreign competition was seriously threatening the B.B.C. monopoly. It came from stations operating in countries where commercial broadcasting was allowed, such as France, for instance, where "the idea of commercial radio had blossomed almost as soon as in the United States." (80) By the mid-1920s, a
Captain Leonard F. Plugge, trained as a scientist, contacted French stations to transmit sponsored programmes to Britain. He then began to travel all over Europe to try to obtain concessions for transmitting time. In 1930, he formed the International Broadcasting Company which produced sponsored programmes transmitted by various European stations (such as Radio Luxembourg, Radio Cote d'Azur, and many others in France and in Spain). (81) Since 1931, IBC also ran directly Radio Normandy. In 1935, while Plugge was elected (Conservative) MP for Chatham, a seat which he retained for ten years, the company also started its own 'programme unit'. In a short span of time, IBC succeeded in collecting a rather large fortune; as market researches were showing, the audience was growing impressively. (82) "When British listeners get bored with the B.B.C. - and there is no doubt that some do - especially on Sundays -," wrote in 1938 the first European Director of the Columbia Broadcasting System (the big American network), "they turn the dial an inch or so and they get Luxemburg." (83) Indeed, towards the end of the 1930s, the phenomenon had grown so much in size so as to acquire a worrying dimension. The problem these stations presented was twofold: not only did they compete for an audience with the B.B.C. They also offered an interesting outlet to American advertisers who were attempting to sell their products on the British market. (84) "In the latter part of 1938," a famous entertainer recalls, "the I.B.C. commissioned a firm of American radio research experts ... to prepare a report on listening habits in London and the Home Counties. The survey produced some astonishing - and even alarming - figures. It showed that on Sunday mornings eighty-two per cent of the sets in use were tuned to commercial stations operating outside the United Kingdom." (85)

Indeed by the time Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandie had grown to national favourites, opinion polls especially designed to acquire information on radio audiences were beginning to flourish. The British Institute of Public Opinion began to show a growing interest in radio listeners' attitude and
preferences and since the late 1930s it published a series of surveys on the subject. In December 1937 a poll on the level of listening to foreign commercial stations and on comparative attitudes towards the B.B.C. was conducted. It showed that 68% of those interviewed listened to commercial programmes on the radio (32 did not), but only 17% said they preferred these to the B.B.C. programmes. (86)

The configuration of private interests (and public attitudes) which had taken shape in the early 1920s then changed significantly in the following decade. At some point it even seemed to be able to damage irremediably the sophisticated equilibria established in 1922. All the more so since this restlessness of the business world was paralleled by a growing inquietude of political circles over the defensibility of the monopoly.

While the idea behind the public corporation model of organization was never seriously questioned and seems to have rallied almost universal support within the political and cultural world for an amazingly long period of time, the monopoly of the ether and public financing does not seem to have enjoyed a similar almost unqualified support. The monopolistic structure was designed to protect British broadcasting from what were considered the degenerating effects of competition, as shown by the American experience; chaos on one side, homogenization of tastes and lowering of cultural standards on the other. Financing through licence fees should have prevented commercial influence on programmes and keep advertising away from broadcasting.

Monopolistic control of a cultural service (or industry) is not easily accepted in liberal democratic societies. (87) Absence of competition is in fact often identified with a serious limitation of the principle of the freedom of expression (and may run up against pressing economic interests). The main arguments brought forward to either defend or debunk the B.B.C. monopoly have not changed much all through the twentieth century. (88) Those who were in favour of the Corporation monopoly, as those who had introduced it and then
repeatedly confirmed its validity maintained that not only was it the best viable solution to the problem of interferences (all the more dramatic in a small country such as England), but that it allowed for programmes of a higher cultural standard since it did not have to struggle for audiences and therefore surrender to the "tyranny of popular taste." (89) The enemies of monopoly, on the other hand, saw in it a potential threat to the freedom of expression and criticized the authoritarian tendency to impose upon listeners what the B.B.C. bureaucrats thought good for them. Among these, the advertisers further stressed the danger of suffocating the country’s economic vitality.

Strictly related to the questioning of the validity of the monopoly was the problem of financing. If competition was to be introduced new resources had to be found; or, as advertisers would have put it, if British goods were to be sold, commercial radio had to be given a chance. This was the reasoning which would eventually lead some critics of the B.B.C. to urge for a revision of the third constitutive feature of the system set up in 1922-1927: public financing. (90) These criticisms easily found their way to the government machinery. Especially after that a new terribly expensive enterprise seemed to be looming large in the future of the broadcasting service: the possibility to transmit not only sound but images. The beginning of the discussion on television indeed provided for a most powerful urge to reconsider the licence system. Since the very first experiments the new methods of transmission of images were proving extremely expensive. (91) In 1935 the members of the first parliamentary committee on television "taking note of the threatened high costs of that medium" declared to be regarding "advertising with less disfavour." (92) What was still unclear, though, was whether the country could (and would be willing to) invest in commercial television: while costs were very high, the uncertain technology did not guarantee success in audience reception. In 1936, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain, had to acknowledge that the introduction of sponsoring would not have had a great economic impact and it
would not have sufficed to support the introduction of a television service. (93) In fact, Britain was among the first countries in the world to have a regular television service (which started in 1936), and public support (political and financial) had been crucial for its establishment. In the United States, where the setting up of a television service was left to private initiative, the public had to wait until the big companies decided that the service would be reasonably advantageous economically (It had then to reach a higher level of technical development to be able to attract as vast an audience as possible). In Britain it was started almost experimentally. Before the war it had a very limited audience and reception was geographically restricted to the London area. Still, in 1936 it could be counted upon as a great success, and with its miraculous aura it could easily be used by the supporters of the monopoly who could claim its innovating supremacy. (94) In this sense, if the discussion on television aroused a new interest in alternative financing and organizational systems, before the war it eventually played in favour of the maintenance of the existing state of things.

As far as public attitudes towards the B.B.C. and commercial radio are concerned, the data on the continental stations' audiences stand as an unquestionable reality (reluctantly acknowledged by the Corporation itself). That a widespread feeling of resentment against radio advertising in particular was still strong in the late 1930s seems also plausible. It probably had much less to do with the defence of a peculiar conception of culture (ideally viewed by the most traditional among the enemies of advertising, as antithetic to commercial considerations), than with the powerful strength of listening habits. In 1938, Mass Observation conducted a survey among its observers on public attitudes towards advertising. The sample surveyed was quantitatively limited (200 observers) and socially characterized (lower middle class). Being the only sophisticated attempt at a general evaluation of attitudes towards advertising and commercial broadcasting before the war however its results retain some
interest. Out of the 200 observers who answered Mass Observation questions, "a fifth ... are absolutely in favour of advertising as a useful and necessary institution in their lives, another fifth is opposed to it on social grounds and as a dangerous influence, while the remaining three/fifths have a divided opinion, they both accept it as useful and are opposed to its abuses". As far as the different advertising media were concerned, "newspaper advertisement ... is considered the most successful. At the other end of the scale comes wireless advertising; only a few judge it to be the most helpful medium, but over a third find it very annoying. One reason for this is probably that the newspaper is a much older established advertising medium than the wireless, which has only recently been developed for this purpose, its use not yet being socially acceptable (the B.B.C. can't be used for it)." (95)

The B.B.C. and the press reacted strongly to the manoeuvres of the advertisers and the faltering support of certain state departments. Their demands envisaged no compromise. Their only strategy was to urge the government to exercise a brutal political intervention and to decree by law the end of foreign competition. (96) The situation seemed to degenerate when the rumour was reported that the feared American intervention in European broadcasting could become reality. In November 1937 the Dutch Utrechtsch Dagblad published an article on an announced "Radio Invasion of Europe." It reported an exclusive interview with a Mr. Leo Y. Chertok "the well known American financier" who planned to introduce commercial broadcasting in Europe. According to the author of the article, a Radio Syndicate had already been formed which was negotiating with various European stations. The story had a happy ending for the B.B.C. and it was probably blown-up for reasons internal to the debate on broadcasting which was going on in the Netherlands. Chertok was not half as powerful as he had been made to appear. He had no connection with the networks and was "apparently one of those who operates on more or less of a shoestring and who talk rather big to impress their clients." (97) Nevertheless, the reactions
were prompt and significant. The British press refused to publish the information, probably for fear of giving too much notice to a threatening competitor. More generally, the story is significant as it exemplifies a recurrent British obsession (which will become even stronger after the war): that Americans might decide to intervene directly on the scene. That the "American invasion" was never to materialize is an interesting question in itself, probably rather complex to solve. What should be emphasized here is that when rumours were reported that it could become reality the reactions were immediate and direct, and B.B.C., politicians and businessmen got together to reject it as swiftly as possible. On that point, once again, agreement between the Corporation, the political world and private interests have always been reached very easily. What was becoming increasingly difficult was to prevent, in line of principle, single stations from transmitting beyond their country's frontiers.

Since the very early years of broadcasting, Britain had consistently exercised its influence in diplomatic circles to the effect that international agreements on the diffusion of messages by wireless and on broadcasting (namely, the allocation of wavelengths) (98) would be concluded before Europe got trapped in the 'chaos of the air.' In May 1933, the International Broadcasting Union ruled against transmissions from foreign countries which followed principles different from those established in the receiving country. However, private interests were growing stronger and while the Post Office consistently engaged itself to protect the B.B.C. monopoly, it became increasingly hard to control what was going on beyond British frontiers. The Continental stations' success rested upon developments which were well in progress and which were proving durable. Advertisers and advertising agencies could not be silenced any more, either in Britain or in continental Europe. As soon as 1933, the Foreign Office pronounced itself against too strict a defence of the monopoly against international competition: "Apart altogether from the difficulty there would be
in persuading the foreign stations (or their governments) from broadcasting material in any language they please ... to attempt to prevent advertisers from using this perfectly legitimate medium for advertising their wares would be against the interests of trade concerned." (99)

In November and December 1933 the advertisers conducted a press campaign against the threatened intervention of the government (promoted by the Post Office) against commercial stations. Three years later, the World Telecommunications Conference held in Cairo "refused to support the British Post Office in condemning commercial broadcasting for countries overseas." (100) The B.B.C. was losing its legal battle, and inviting a foreign government to silence one of its radio stations transmitting entertainment, music and advertisements was becoming more and more unacceptable.

All the more so since, as the Foreign Office note highlighted, the economic performance of the nation could be damaged. In a telegram to the Conservative Prime Minister, Baldwin, representatives of 300 firms clearly stated what they saw as the basic issue at stake: an intervention against continental stations, it said, "would deprive British manufacturers of a means of advertising that has proved conclusively to be of great benefit to British trade both at home and abroad." (101) Even the battle for commercial radio, as long as it did not touch upon the B.B.C. basic structure, could then be held up as a defence of the nation's interests. It was clearly better to be part of the enterprise, and try to control it from the inside, the British entrepreneurs were saying, than be left out of a profitable initiative: "Even if the present facilities are suppressed," a "Statement on Sponsored Programmes" of the Incorporated Society of British advertisers Radio Defence Committee philosophically stated, "listeners will still be able to tune in by short-wave to the U.S.A. and listen to advertising of American goods" (102) (and be convinced to buy them!).
The controlled restlessness of the business world, and its political reflections, are best exemplified by an article which appeared in the *Economist* in 1936. Commenting upon the Ullswater Committee Report of 1936, the magazine of the established economic interests surveyed the main "systems of controlling, or not controlling, radio broadcasting. On one hand there is the British system of complete monopoly," which, the essayist wrote, could also be called "European." On the other, he found the American system. Both had their advantages and disadvantages. However, if one was forced to choose, he continued, the British way was without doubt the better: "Given the liberty only to choose between Sir John Reith and Pink Pastilles Inc., one plumps, without too much hesitation for Sir John, Sunday programmes and all. But is it necessary to choose? Could not the merits of both systems be combined?" (103)

The discussion on monopoly (and alternative financing methods) then grew along with the qualitative and quantitative expansion of broadcasting all through the inter-war years and after. Public interest in the organization of British radio was on the increase. (104) (The number of licences continued to grow all through the inter-war years.) While government committees repeatedly confirmed their support to the Corporation, critics and supporters of the B.B.C. passionately debated their respective positions. Different national models were confronted and evaluated. America was then the best known example of a competitive and commercial system of broadcasting whose characteristics and consequences could be realistically discussed through reference to its experience. It is far from surprising then that "broadcasting in the United States was cited by both sides to prove their arguments." (105) What is interesting, however, is that, since the early 1930s, both supporters and critics of the B.B.C. model maintained their verbal opposition to the American system (as shown in the article of the *Economist*) and few were those who dared to praise it. Many things had changed since the early 1920s. Different broadcasting services had been set up in many democratic countries. The British
system had established itself as a plausible solution, if not perfect. America
was no longer the obvious model to look up to. Furthermore, the American system
came increasingly to be perceived and described as a reflection of American life
and attitudes, as distant and exotic as anything in America. "The whole system
of American broadcasting" reported in 1932 the B.B.C. Handbook, "where it
appears to us strange is merely a reflection of American life still outside our
comprehension." (106) Three decades later Hugh Greene, at that time B.B.C:
Director General, would have exclaimed: "We [the B.B.C.] are as strange in the
American scene as a kangaroo would be in the English countryside." (107) The
nationalist vision of the two broadcasting systems had become perfectly
specular: they both could be viewed and described as the unique products of
traditional national inclinations. In Britain, in this vision, the B.B.C. had
grown to the status of a fixed feature of British democracy and society (as well
as of British broadcasting), which could be reformed (but not substantially), to
which other systems could be added but whose existence and nature were not in
question. (108)

1.4 - The Broadcasters

As soon as 1928, an article had appeared on the B.B.C. Handbook which
announced the existence of an "European model" which could be contrasted to the
American. The British experience, it claimed, had played a crucial role in its
establishment, the U.K. having been the first country to perceive "the correct
lines of development." The countries of Europe which did not promptly follow its
example, the article went on, were still striving to set up a viable
broadcasting service and owed "the lag under which they suffer principally to
the fact of following other lines of policy, and notably the policy of
attempting, in European conditions, to copy American individualism and laissez
faire and to apply the American method of finance by publicity in a manner, on a
scale and in an ambient where success is practically impossible." (109) Along
with the "European" tone, rather typical of broadcasting history, what is interesting here is also the explicit correlation made between insufficient economic development and European tendencies towards monopoly in broadcasting, an image which is an echo of what was indeed being said in the business world.

That article was one of the many dealing with the different systems of broadcasting which were by then being produced by the Corporation. They all, more or less, contributed to the construction of a sort of "myth of foundation." Quite naturally, the men who were put in charge of the service, while a terribly varied group, staunchly defended, and understandably so, not only the very existence of the B.B.C. but contributed substantially to the image of its diversity. As it is obvious, it was indeed within the Corporation that the basic principles upon which this difference was based were adapted to the daily workings of broadcasting. Probably rather correctly, this adaptation is generally interpreted as being the work primarily of an individual whose influence upon the subsequent history of sound broadcasting in Britain is wholly out of question. It was John C. W. Reith, the B.B.C. first Director General, who consistently urged the government to transform the British Broadcasting Company into a public corporation. It was Reith who interpreted to the broadcasters the main aims of the new service; or at least it was with Reith that the original principles of British broadcasting came to be identified with. As it has often been emphasised, the basic tenet of that interpretation revolved around the priority given to the task to educate the audience rather than to entertain it. While it probably passed through an early phase in which "education" spelt primarily almost straightforward transmission of the élite's culture, it changed much thereafter, along with the progressive popularisation of the service. Even in the wider political thought, education has meant unproblematic diffusion of élitist culture, interests and idiosyncrasies as national culture; or even straight political propaganda, on one side. But it has also inspired social
concern, genuine efforts of popularisation and the diffusion of a critical
vision of society and established culture. A combination of these two extremes
of the same spectrum is to be found in the texture of British broadcasting.

(113) What was common to those otherwise opposed visions was the emphasis put
upon the idea of a socially controlled system of broadcasting. While the
meanings attributed to the notion of education, as the content of the formula of
public service, has changed over the years, then, and have always had different
meanings for different groups of people, what eventually came to be assumed as
an indisputable rule of British broadcasting was that broadcasting could not be
left to private initiative because its principal function was to be to educate
listeners (and viewers). It was against the background of such a demanding task
that increasingly, in the 1930s, the Corporation set out to present itself as a
democratic and socially advanced solution to the problem of the popularization
of culture and information. As such, it also claimed, it adhered to and truly
interpreted the traditional habits and preferences of the British peoples.

Current mythology increasingly described the B.B.C. as a purely British model
which juxtaposed itself both to the tyranny of commercial interests (the
American method) and to the authoritarianism of a complete control of the
government.

Indeed such an image was promptly assimilated by the leading opinion. So
when, in August 1934, The Times published its "Broadcasting Number" the B.B.C.
was already part of the established institutions of British democracy. As such,
it was presented on the prestigious newspaper by Sir John Reith, who endeavoured
to describe it by comparing the B.B.C. experience with the U.S. system, on one
side, and the German and Russian on the other. British broadcasting institutions
were, according to Reith, "British mentality at its best," with its "innate
tendency to respect opinions on the one hand and in the main to reject ex parte
statements on the other." "Broadcasting organised on a 'Charter' basis," he
wrote, "represents ... the juste milieu between the purely authoritative
That Reith himself would talk so strongly about American radio is hardly accidental. Asa Briggs repeatedly talks about the peculiarly Reithian obsession with the United States. "The parallels between Britain and America fascinated him," he writes. (115) The B.B.C.'s first Director General is obviously a central character to the story of British attitudes towards American broadcasting. He had spent two years in the United States during the Great War as an expert mechanical engineer to inspect the arms produced there for the British army. While an admirer of America (he introduced American management techniques into the B.B.C.), (116) he seemed to entertain a basically unfavourable opinion of U.S. broadcasting and was utterly convinced that Britain needed something very different. However he not only found the American commercial system perfectly legitimate in U.S. conditions. He somehow seems to have implied that the Corporation could be improved by the very existence of its counterpart, as if a sort of international division of labour could be established in cultural matters. "Americans," he wrote, "were against monopoly; it was a good thing that one country in the world was sticking to individualism." (117) But Reith knew also very well how dangerous it could be to acknowledge the good qualities, and the possible function, of the American system, a powerful mechanism which ran so fundamentally against the established principles of British broadcasting. "If ... [American broadcasters] asked what were the safeguards against abuse of monopoly and who guarded the guardians," as they did during Reith's visits to the United States, "here was the answer," he recalls. "If, conforming to and at the same time taking command of, the inevitable tendency of the time, the public - American or British - imposed on its key men the ideal of public service, encouraged and supported that ideal
where it already existed by institutions that fortified as well as controlled their activities, then the guardians guarded themselves. And competition was not necessary to make them adventurous." (118)

It is the intrinsic ambiguity of Reithian criticism of American radio which has most permanently permeated the B.B.C. attitude to what was happening on the other side of the Ocean. There was a very vital system which ideally could produce the best broadcasting service in the world. It was to be kept under constant observation so as to get to know its novelties. Being inadequate to its responsibilities, however, it should not be uncritically imitated.

Many stimulating ideas could come from America. Even the Listener, the B.B.C. "quality" periodical, had acknowledged a certain universal legitimacy to U.S. broadcasting: "In impoverished Europe the resources available for its development have to be used with care, so as to avoid the unnecessary wastage of useless competition and duplication; but on the other side of the Atlantic, rich America can afford to indulge in a variety of experiment which certainly yields results that are worth watching from our side." (119)

They had to be interpreted and sifted very attentively, though. In Reith's vision, the principles which should have informed the B.B.C. attitude towards U.S. broadcasting were crystal-clear. "It was the 'absence of the institution which was preventing the best men in American radio from doing their best work at the same time permitting others to operate without much idea of their responsibility to the public.'" (120) And Reith was determined to prevent this from happening in the United Kingdom. Indeed the individuals who entered the magic world of broadcasting before the war were immediately made clear that they were to bear a heavy burden.

Autobiographies and general comments on broadcasting by B.B.C. officials were and are numerous. They add a further, more lively, dimension to the debate on America. The accounts of their ideas and experiences draw a more articulated picture of what the Corporation was all about as their relationship with the
Reithian approach was not as linear as Reith himself seems to have envisaged. The image of American broadcasting entertained by the professionals therefore provides for a complex, or more confused, operational dimension against which the politicians and publicists' discourse can be interpreted.

After the initial preponderance of military personnel, the 'bright young things' from Oxford and Cambridge soon became the cornerstone of the management of British broadcasting. The main body was formed by what has been described as a "liberal humanist élite" which considered American broadcasting interesting but basically wrong in its assumptions. The complex attitude towards American broadcasting expressed by John Reith is rather linearly reflected in the relationships entertained by the B.B.C. with the U.S. networks. The visit to the United States, either on "grace leave" or on a business trip, was a rather common experience for a B.B.C. manager. Attention was kept on American technical developments and new ideas in programmes. The obsession with U.S. broadcasting which recurred in the political debate seems to find here a solid ground. Even on the professionals' side, America was a constant point of reference. However, if fervent advocates of the American system existed and expressed their feelings, the prevailing attitude within the Corporation was one of interest accompanied by a recognition of the differences in approach and a more or less openly stated belief in the superiority of the values held up by the B.B.C. Self-complacency was based primarily on a conviction of the better quality of the B.B.C. programmes and of its technical efficiency. In 1923 Lord Gainford, the first President of the British Broadcasting Company, declared: "I believe we are technically as far advanced after six months as America is after two and a half years. We have acted without regard to revenue and in spite of the apparent lack of any steps by the Post Office to carry out their own regulations, solely in the public interest." The idea that a public service was apt to ensure fairer technical improvements recurs in the B.B.C. mythology of itself. Talking about
the lead in broadcasting which the United States had undoubtedly had immediately
after the Great War, which Lord Gainford himself had acknowledged, Cecil Arthur
Lewis, then B.B.C. Deputy Director of Programmes, wrote: "Let others rush at the
new inventions, and do the experimenting, spend the money, get the hardknocks,
and buy their experience at a high price. We British sit tight and look before
we leap ... We may often be behind in the early stages of a new science, but
once under way, we soon catch up and generally lead the field before long."

(127) In general, there was also on the apparent neutral technical field a
twofold attitude on the part of the B.B.C. officials: on one side, allowance had
to be made for the technical superiority of American radio; on the other, the
uncovering of the commercial motive which brought forward innovations and new
ideas made them highly suspicious even towards techniques.

Peter Eckersley, who was to become a bitter critic of the B.B.C., and its
moralistic and bureaucratic atmosphere, explained the strength of this sort of
self-complacent feelings: "Although I was everywhere impressed by the vitality
of American programmes," he writes of his first visit to the United States in
1924, "I was at that time convinced that the system was wrong. It may be that my
views were more a product of loyalty to the B.B.C. than of a detached judgement
... In spite, or perhaps because of my visit, I still upheld the superiority of
the B.B.C. system." (128) In a series of articles on his 1927 visit to the
United States originally motivated by the participation to the Washington
International Radio Conference, Eckersley ventured "to suggest that the track of
American development has curved towards our system ... But there is still a very
real difference, and a difference which ... is to the advantage of the British
listener. Essentially run as a publicity medium, American broadcasting serves
primarily the dense centres of population ... Our service is conceived
nationally, their service is conceived 'urbanly.'" (129)

1.5 - "We Talk a Different Language": the Un-Americanness of the B.B.C.
The juxtaposition to the American system came then to be seen as an essential feature of British broadcasting institutions. Generally speaking the self-definition drawn up in the 1920s by the B.B.C. and its political supporters came inevitably to be interwoven and confused with the alleged opposition public service/commercialism upon which the very existence of the Corporation was grounded. The contrast between U.K. and U.S. broadcasting was therefore conceptualized in Britain as the difference between a public service and a market model; the former's defining feature being the responsibility towards its audience, the latter defined as a "way of seeing the 'real world' primarily in terms of trade, economics and commodities." (130) It was John C. W. Reith, who, in 1933, after a meeting with the representatives of the American networks, declared: "Apart from individual discussions with Mr. Aylesworth of N.B.C. and Mr. Paley, president of the Columbia, there were the two meetings with the chief executives of each concern referred to. These were enjoyable experiences ... But we talk a different language. Their primary object is to make money; so primary as to make any other object almost negligible." (131) At what he perceived as the other end of the spectrum, broadcasting organized as a public corporation financed through licences protected its listeners against the dictatorship of commercial interests. In the current mythology, then, the opposition between American and British broadcasting expressed also a dichotomy between money and moral (or social) values. (132)

Very soon, in 1929, in an article published on the *Radio Times* in response to an attack on the B.B.C. launched from the pages of a then well known journal, the *Realist*, which had asserted the unquestionable superiority of American broadcasting, the Corporation confirmed its fundamental critique of the American system, the excesses of competition among stations "the sorting out of which involves very expensive and selective receiving sets", and the neurotic interruptions of advertising matter. "In England," it stated, "the tired worker who has been all day shouted at and advertised to in his newspaper, on the
hoardings, in train or omnibus may settle down to his evening's wireless entertainment with the feeling that at last he is free from the necessity to listen to someone who has something to sell." (133) The B.B.C. did not conceal therefore its desire to present itself as a super partes national institution which embodied neither the sums of individual interests nor the tyranny of the government but an idealized nation.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Ocean, something was happening that seemed to confirm the British conceptualization of American broadcasting. While violently contrasted at the 1922 Radio Conference, the idea of sponsored programmes acquired quickly almost universal support in the United States. (134) The networks' peculiar purposes (as they had been described described by Reith) materialized in a peculiar conception of radio programming and in a structure based on competition for audience and advertising revenues. (135) By the late 1920s, the "quintessentially American" system had taken on a rather definite identity: "the industry remained privately owned, operated for profit, sustained by the sale of airtime to advertisers, and dominated by an oligopoly of networks and their local affiliates. It is regulated but not controlled by an agency of the national government, the Federal Communication Commission." (136)

From then on, "the view of the past" of "commercial broadcasters and network executives" became "the authorized chronicle." "In their interpretation of the truth, an enlightened business community had produced a broadcasting system reflective of the very best in American society ... Any attempt to criticize or challenge the arrangement represented a direct assault on the larger society as well as a rejection of the nation's past. The favored sons rejected demands by noncommercial broadcasters for special privileges and government intervention because these modifications stood outside the American heritage; indeed they were attacked as symbols of British or European solutions." (137) Almost at the same time, since the mid-1920s, the B.B.C. and the big American networks were legitimizing their history by linking it to the
national traditions, defined negatively as un-American, in the former case, and un-European (or British) in the latter. They both claimed to embody and synthesize the present and the past (and possibly the future) of the whole country, its political and cultural traditions, its habits and attitudes. (138)
"It [the B.B.C.] is ... a most interesting example of our national genius for finding workable solutions to the most intractable problems. At the same time it is an outstanding achievement in socialisation - because it is a socialised institution for which the nation has to thank successive Conservative Governments plus some mental stimulation from the Labour party." (139)

2.1 - Questioning the Quality of B.B.C. Programmes

While gradual changes had been going on since the late 1930s, it was during the Second World War that the basic principles of British broadcasting came under radical review. Up to 1943, when public interest in broadcasting institutional problems was still rather low, the attention of the very great audience was focused upon the unsatisfactory quality of B.B.C. entertainment programmes at a moment when people needed evasion. A few months after the outbreak of the war, M.P.s were hotly debating the disappointing performance of the B.B.C. and understandably so, as was thought to disarm an effective means of controlling and directing public opinion: "If our broadcasts are not attractive, if the news is dry, if the entertainment is mediocre," Mr. de Rothschild warned his colleagues at the Commons in October 1939, "and if the music is of a low standard, which is what people complain of, the listener just turns the button and he gets a foreign broadcast."(140)

Indeed in that very month, 53% of the people interviewed by the British Institute of Public Opinion declared that they listened (if not regularly) to foreign stations. By January 1940 the figure had gone up to 65%. In terms of a "war of words" the figures were clearly dangerously high, certainly high enough to induce politicians to wonder about the B.B.C. approach to broadcasting. The
debate which ensued was not exclusively, nor mainly, linked to institutional party affiliations and seems to have been pursued at a medium level between society and the party system. Politicians and civil servants tended to move within the uneven field which stretched between the broadcasting Corporation and its unhappy listeners.

In spite of the political bustle, however, the institutional situation changed little during the war (but the B.B.C. endeavoured a special effort to better its entertainment programmes) and the process of increasing closeness to the listeners' preferences proceeded very slowly. In 1942, Tom Harrisson, the famous social "observer" of Mass Observation, could still write: "Most people accept the programmes and enjoy them but there is a large amount of potential interest in alternative programmes, as is generally shown by the largely increased British public for the A.F.N. [American Forces Network] ... and for the European Services of the B.B.C." (141)

When Harrison was talking, the American Forces Network had not as yet any English-based stations. It transmitted from the continent and only to very limited areas. The phenomenon of the popularity of the U.S. radio stations he was referring to would increase much beyond its 1942 level when American programmes began to broadcast from within the British Isles. The authorization was unwillingly granted by the British government when a considerable number of American troops were sent to Britain and were stationed there waiting for the opening of the second front. The B.B.C. tried to resist the U.S. plan. After all, the monopolistic Corporation recalled, Canadians and Poles had been stationed in England for longer and were well catered for by the existing programmes. But political and military priorities dictated another course. So if the whole negotiations were conducted "with the utmost tact," (142) the ultimate outcome was not to be easily influenced by civilian worries. In July 1943, then, the American Forces Network started its British transmissions. It had a studio centre in London and low power transmitters covering the main U.S. camps. It
could not be listened to from London; in spite of the repeated pressures "for the A.F.N. to be audible there," (thousands of Americans sojourned in the capital for varying periods) "this the B.B.C. was able to resist, though the A.F.N. programme was piped in to all American canteens and Red Cross clubs." It was, for the Corporation, a powerful competitor. It was "the ideal programme for British teen-agers, for apart from a modest proportion of live programmes produced here it consisted of all the top ranking band and comedy shows that American commercial radio could supply. These were recorded in Hollywood ... with their commercial announcements removed ... The A.F.N. thus brought listeners the best entertainment picked from four competing networks, with millions of advertisers' money behind it but without the advertisers' announcements, and practically free from serious items except for news; in fact a more or less continuous procession of swing music and gag shows." (143) So it was that Anglo-American military and political cooperation enabled the British audience to acquire first hand experience of the "commercial model" (or a version of it) with the B.B.C.'s blessing. And British listeners seemed to enjoy it greatly, in spite of its untraditional, and probably un-British content. The audience response to the American Forces Programme was very often cited as an argument against the B.B.C. monopoly. (144) In this case, however, any conclusion derived from the A.F.N. ratings would seem doubly unfair. First of all the U.S. station "could never be heard by more than 10 per cent of the civilian population." (145) Secondly, the A.F.N. programmes were selected as the best programmes produced in the United States and were by no means representative of a typical commercial station output, as the B.B.C. itself tirelessly repeated.

In parallel, as Harrisson was saying, by the early 1940s the B.B.C. External Services were also an established feature of British broadcasting. International listening in Europe and America was born almost at the same time when domestic broadcasting services were set up, more precisely when the use of
ultra short waves opened up the possibility of long distance transmissions. However, while in the 1920s the phenomenon of international listening was still quantitatively limited (in Britain only the really keen amateurs practiced it) it soon evolved into a permanent feature of radio programmes. While American programmes transmitted directly from the United States were becoming increasingly popular (no matter how restricted the public, their fame reached large audiences), in 1929 the B.B.C. inaugurated the short wave station of Daventry which would become renowned all over the world. It was in fact from Daventry that from 1932 the B.B.C. Empire Service directed its programmes to the Commonwealth and to the British abroad. While famous transmissions were broadcast from Britain to the "empire" all through the 1930s, it was during the war, and as a result of it, that short wave broadcasting expanded enormously, both in transmissions and audiences (and not only in England). (146) "The formal division of the B.B.C.'s 'external services' was," even when the war broke out, "into European and Empire (later changed to Overseas) both of which broadcast in English and in other languages, but the practical divisions were rather different. There were broadcasts to troops overseas and to the 'exiles' in Dominions and Colonies, those who regarded Britain as home; broadcasts to the general public of the English speaking countries, and to foreign language Dominion citizens ...; broadcasts to Allies and neutrals; to occupied countries and to enemy countries." (147) Within this varied output, the European Service, "largely isolated from the rest of the B.B.C.," retained its own peculiar flavour: "its staff consisted in great part of refugees, who could call Kings and Queens and Prime Ministers of provisional governments to their microphones." (148) This immediacy gave it a different flavour which might have sounded, to many listeners, much more attractive than some more accurate and rigidly planned B.B.C. domestic programmes. Although internal and manageable, the external service nevertheless were viewed by the most conservative side of the Corporation as a further threat to the established rules of monopoly.
The specific circumstances of war, the dramatic thirst for information which they created, could partially account for the unusually intense interest in foreign transmissions which those developments seemed to reveal. However, as the audience response to the A.F.N. indicates, the desire for more, and better, news does not provide for an exhaustive explanation of the appeal enjoyed by alternative programmes. Opinion polls, qualitative analysis of observers, politicians and publicists were disclosing the existence of an increasing dissatisfaction with the B.B.C. programmes and a pronounced restlessness over the lack of alternatives. In September 1943 the British Institute of Public Opinion conducted a poll to test opinions on the B.B.C. monopoly of broadcasting. The results showed that 40% would approve ‘of allowing commercial broadcasting’ (42% would ‘disapprove’ and 18% held no opinion). (149) There again, it was so high a percentage as to be hardly negligible. Restlessness was not confined, at least not any more, to the “thoughtful minority” Harrisson had talked about. B.B.C. entertainment, as the Corporation’s officials were increasingly acknowledging, was simply not good enough to cater for their needs. (150) This was the main point of attraction of the A.F.N. broadcasts.

No matter whether they seemed to concern themselves with what might appear as the most frivolous side of life, these pressures deserved careful consideration. The immediate political problem, which the B.B.C. was presented with, was that, as de Rotschild had warned, a dissatisfied audience could be easily enticed by foreign propaganda. More attention was therefore to be given to the listeners’ preferences to win them back in the short-term. However, as the war went on, the trouble with the existing institutions of broadcasting seemed to extend well beyond the immediacies of the war. The whole issue slowly gained momentum, to come out in the open in 1943. At one point, in the first phases of the second half of the war, the British government plainly acknowledged that post-war broadcasting was going to become a crucial issue, as neither the listeners’ reactions (151) nor the pressures from the advertisers
(which were strong already before the war and would expectedly grow even stronger after) could be overlooked.

While sections of the public were growing restless, cabinet committees were busy discussing new policy plans. To meet with rising expectations, and demanding requests, it was thought, all caution had to be dropped and the discussion left open. The B.B.C. Charter was due for renewal in 1946. Given the complexity of the issues at stake and the changes which seemed well under way, the government started its inquiry over the future of the B.B.C. while the war was still in progress. In January 1944 a Cabinet Committee on broadcasting was appointed to elaborate new proposals for broadcasting policy. Its chairman, Frederich James Marquis, 1st Earl of Woolton, would be one of the Conservative leaders of the struggle for the introduction of commercial television a few years afterwards. (152) As a chairman of the 1944 broadcasting committee he did not appear to emerge as a particularly innovative reformer. His very presence however testifies to the links which existed between the discussion started during the war and the eventual break-up of the B.B.C. monopoly.

The Committee itself did not play a vital part in the actual policy plans for the reconstruction of the broadcasting service and did not succeed in introducing major changes. In 1945 it dissolved itself having left the major problems unsolved. Nevertheless, its agenda brings out the basic questions which broadcasting posed to the political world in the 1940s, that is to say: "(a) What should be the future organization of broadcasting in this country? (b) What can be done to prevent the establishment on foreign territory adjoining this country of commercial stations ... which would compete with the B.B.C.? (c) What should be done after the war to control wireless in ex-enemy countries? (d) What can be done to develop an international wireless service devoted to spreading the principles of international cooperation?" (153) Under point (a) the discussion on, and the growing impatience with, the B.B.C. monopoly is hinted at, while, rather significantly, the other three points all refer to the
question of international broadcasting and point at an important intrinsic
contradiction of the British foreign broadcasting policy. While "international
cooperation" is solemnly called upon, the urge to keep foreign stations away
from the United Kingdom is in parallel confirmed. The effort to keep
international competition under severe control was not to be abandoned, no
matter if it hardly fitted with the proclaimed ideals of world cooperation. That
this was the most immediate task to be undertaken, the main threat to domestic
broadcasting, was made clear even before the official appointment of the Woolton
Committee. "If ... the policy of preserving the B.B.C. free from commercial
exploitation is continued, the question of foreign stations which are exploited
by commercial interests requires examination," wisely warned the Postmaster
General in 1943. "Before the war, stations such as Radio Normandy and Radio
Luxembourg put forward sponsored programmes in competition with the B.B.C." It
would have been bad enough to have them back, he continued. But worse things
could happen if an inflexible line of policy was not devised and consistently
followed: "There is," he vaticinated, "the possibility of stations adjoining
this country being controlled in the interest of U.S. business to the detriment
of British trade and industry." (154) This could not be tolerated. Once again
the menace of the United States could be used as a starting signal. The
discussion could not be delayed any more. An urgent solution was needed.

2.2 - The B.B.C. Monopoly and International Broadcasting

If the increased political control exercised during the war years over any
kind of wireless communications had prompted state departments and politicians
to start examining future broadcasting policies and drawing out scenarios rather
early, the intricacies of the problem prolonged the discussion well after 1945.
International broadcasting had expanded enormously during the war. The ideology
of the free circulation of ideas and information formed a crucial part of allied
propaganda, before as well as, even more strongly, after the war. The endeavour
to defend the B.B.C. monopoly against continental competition appeared more and more difficult. No consistent argument seemed to exist which could rule out for foreigners what was being allowed to the B.B.C. And nobody seemed prepared to renounce the prestige which derived from the international activities of the broadcasting Corporation. "The B.B.C. ... has become the most effective instrument of its kind in the world," the War Cabinet Broadcasting Committee acknowledged in 1945. "We have a fine hold, through broadcasting, not only on the intellects but on the emotional sympathy of Europeans. But it can easily be lost ... Our adverse foreign exchange position will for years to come remove from our hands a variety of economic weapons on which we counted in the past to spread our influence abroad ... Broadcasting and television, which can be paid for entirely, or almost entirely, in sterling, could do much to fill the gap left by these vanished economic weapons." (155)

However, it was not as simple as that and, as time went by, it seemed to become increasingly complicated. Domestic interests (namely the B.B.C. claim to the maintenance of the domestic monopoly) might contradict the internationalizing effort to spread British influence, a strategy which was still a top, if controversial, political priority. (156) During the war the commercial stations transmitting in English from the continent were closed down or diverted to political and strategic purposes. In 1944 Radio Luxembourg, which had interrupted its transmissions immediately after the break up of the war, was taken over by the Anglo-American S.H.A.E.F. (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) who used it for propaganda broadcasts to Central Europe. (157) "The radio station itself was modern and very well equipped," recalled Richard F. Hanser, a U.S. civilian specialist to the psychological warfare unit of the 12th Army Group. "It could just as well have been in a major American city; it had a vast collection of records, for example, including all the popular American dance music ... The Nazis had been using these records for their own propaganda operations to get people to listen, and we did the same
thing - we used Benny Goodman and the Dorsey Brothers and Glenn Miller as bait for listeners, just as the Germans did." (158)

The problem was what was going to happen after the war. In a situation which would have allowed for free competition it could become crucial who was going to play the same records. The Foreign Office top priority when faced with the forthcoming peace was how to continue on as large a scale as possible the B.B.C. broadcasts to Central Europe. Radio Luxembourg formed a crucial part of this policy as it would have granted Britain the use of continental wavelengths. In May 1945, the Foreign Office urged the government to start discussing the future of Radio Luxembourg on the basis of the proposal of a tripartite Anglo-French-American control of the station. Negotiations began between the three governments. At the end of the Summer the feeling was gaining strength that Americans were not willing to participate in the tri-governmental enterprise and that they would have rather liked Radio Luxembourg to be passed over to a private commercial American company working in the interests of the Western powers. (159) In October the United States officially abandoned the negotiations.

Around this time, the Minister of State, the Postmaster General and the Minister of Information of Britain addressed the Government and asked for an urgent consideration of the policy to pursue "to obtain control of Radio Luxembourg as a vehicle for the B.B.C. services to Germany and Austria and in order to prevent the station being used for commercial broadcasting to this country." (160) When, in November 1945, no positive solution had been reached, the possibility of an Anglo-French agreement was discussed. The British government thought it could thus involve the French cabinet into a more general commitment against commercial stations transmitting to Britain from their territory. (161) There again, however, the difficulty to keep international developments under control would soon be dramatically evident. At the beginning of 1946, an inter-departmental discussion between Treasury, Bank of England,
Post Office, Board of Trade, Central Office of Information and Foreign Office officials was held to deal extensively with the official policy of the cabinet and pointed at its difficulties and ambiguities. "Government policy on commercial broadcasting overseas," the resulting memorandum reminded, "derives from the recommendations on the subject in the Ministerial Report on broadcasting which has been approved by the Cabinet" (which said that the B.B.C. monopoly was to be defended and commercial broadcasting consistently fought against in international meetings). Before the war, the committee conceded, that same policy did not succeed to win over the cooperation of the foreign governments involved. However, it was still recommended "that a determined attempt should be made to eliminate" the broadcasting from abroad of advertising programmes. It was in fact hoped that "the Foreign Governments concerned would in future be more ready to appreciate the British point of view than they were before the war." No indications was given of the reasons which would have induced the continental governments to change their attitude. But the remark conceded no compromise on that point. The advantages which could derive from the liberalization of commercial broadcasting were also considered and the data offered by the Board of Trade on the economic implications of wireless advertising were attentively examined. "From the export trade angle it was desirable that British exporters should make use of all forms of publicity and should not be debarred from using media open for use by their competitors from other countries," it was acknowledged. Nevertheless, the memorandum continued, "there are at present serious difficulties in the way of adopting the principles suggested by the Board of Trade" as this would not only contradict the government decision, but it would run up against the problem of the scarcity of wavelengths; furthermore, the fact could not be ignored that most continental stations were 'pirate' stations (162). In conclusion, the ongoing attempts to keep Radio Luxembourg under some form of political control received the full support of the departments involved.
In August 1946 the French government abandoned the negotiations and the British were left fighting alone. The agreement with the Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Radiodiffusion, which operated the station, was still being delayed by the difficulty of reaching a suitable arrangement on the lease and by what the British considered as the non-cooperative attitude of the Luxembourg government. (163) As time went by, the Foreign Office appreciation of the international situation gradually began to change. The 1945 policy to strengthen the British "hold on the present long wavelength," (164) was losing appeal and the Foreign Office declared to be ready to abandon negotiations as soon as it could get alternative wavelengths to transmit to Central Europe, which it eventually obtained at the end of 1946 from Moscow. In January 1947, "from the point of view of the maintenance of the B.B.C. European Service at its present strength, the proposal to hire Radio Luxemburg ... seems much less attractive than it did a year ago." In fact, the Foreign Office was by then ready to admit that "on balance ... the disadvantages of continuing negotiations for the use of Radio Luxembourg either by hire or by purchase outweigh the advantages" and they "recommend that they should be discontinued." (165) Meanwhile the Company which ran Radio Luxemburg had announced its intention to restart its transmissions.

The Post Office consistently struggled to defend the B.B.C. monopoly against all odds (166) and all through the period. In December 1946 a Post Office official wrote a memorandum which should have positively stated the case against Radio Luxemburg and the other commercial stations. It was a delicate subject matter which evoked conflicting interests and whose traditional supporting arguments were losing strength. The author of the memorandum, J. A. Gracie, however, managed to list six main lines of defence. First of all, he said, legal arguments, such as the restrictive norms which at the time regulated any form of publicity in England could be used; secondly, he could see no reason to relax currency restrictions in order to favour British advertisers wishing to sponsor foreign radio programmes; thirdly, the policy towards
commercial broadcasting from abroad was clearly linked with the policy towards
commercial broadcasting at home: it could then endanger the B.B.C. monopoly and
therefore the supposedly good quality of its programmes; fourthly, it would
aggravate international wavelength problems; fifthly, it would compete for
talent with the B.B.C. and therefore render the same programmes more expensive;
lastly, it would run up against the most strenuous opposition from the press.
(167) In the face of Foreign Office increasing indifference and the danger of a
re-establishment of Radio Luxembourg on pre-war lines, Herbert Morrison, the
Lord President of the Council of the Labour Government, urged the Chancellor of
the Exchequer to try to avoid the re-starting of Radio Luxembourg, prohibiting
the British advisers to get round the Exchange Control (the only way in which
they could pay for their radio commercials.) (168)

2.3 - A British Commercial Broadcasting Service

The discussion over the desirability, or harmfulness, of the continental
stations had a clear domestic implication. It was indirectly a discussion over
the desirability of commercial broadcasting in Britain. As such, it extended
well beyond the second half of the 1940s. It could be seen as the starting up of
the process which would result in the break-up of the B.B.C. monopoly in
television in the early 1950s and, to anticipate events even further away, it
had clearly much to do with the introduction of commercial radio in the 1960s.
However, leaving aside the discussion on international broadcasting and its
internal reverberations, the tensions introduced by the Second World War into
the British conceptions of broadcasting were reflected in the debate on the
B.B.C. also in other respects. A parallel debate was started in the early 1940s
which would prove at least as durable and inconclusive. The attitude towards
commercial radios transmitting from the continent depended in fact on the
decision made on the question of financing. If the B.B.C. was not allowed to
introduce advertising, the private enterprises interested in the new advertising medium would have to use those non-British stations.

This was boldly declared as early as December 1944 in an informal meeting between a Radio Production Executive, A. A. Saunders, Sir Robert Renwick, Controller of Communications Equipment, and Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction and chairman of the Broadcasting Committee. In that occasion, the business representatives asked the government "to encourage and assist a group of British business men or other British Nationals to acquire Radio Luxembourg." A British Radio Luxembourg, the advertisers added, would be much better than a foreign one: "It is suggested," they warned, "that if British interests do not take steps to acquire Radio Luxembourg, American interests are very likely to do so." (169) This was also the traditional argument employed by the Board of Trade to support its view in favour of commercial broadcasting. If Radio Luxembourg was not brought under British control, not only the immediate danger of American commercial competition would increase, but the British position could also be endangered for a long time to come. It would in fact have meant self-exclusion from an economic activity which had a brilliant future. If domestic protectionism was pushed too far, the advertising national industry could then be put at a disadvantage, insofar as "British advertising agents and specialists would have no experience in a sphere of advertising in which American advertising specialists are very proficient." Furthermore, British culture could be irremediably damaged. (170)

That the fear of an American "broadcasting invasion" had not been lessened by the war and post-war alliance and agreements and was shared by supporters and opponents of commercial broadcasting was to be shown less than a year later when a memorandum by Stuart Campbell, of the Sunday Pictorial, a member of the Newspapers' Proprietors Association, reached the Lord President of the Council's desk. It consisted of a detailed, if alarming, description of a "scheme for developing commercial radio in Europe" supposedly undertaken by "a syndicate and
four of the biggest American broadcasting companies." The plan, Campbell reported, was centred mainly on commercial television and had Britain as its first objective. But the anti-British plot did not end there, the newspapers' proprietors declared. It also entailed an internal conspiracy: Captain Plugge's plans to re-start a network of commercial broadcasting stations transmitting in English from the Continent. "While it is true that, numerically, the majority of British advertising agencies are opposed to commercial broadcasting," Campbell said, "the largest agencies are in favour and on their volume of business are the bigger section." Campbell then proceeded to reject as false the claim made by the big agencies "that as nothing can prevent an American invasion of Europe with commercial broadcasting they would be foolhardy to stand out against it and so present the business to their American competitors." Even more remarkably, the newspaper proprietors response to the advertising agencies' strategy was also centred on the defence of British business and interests against the U.S. menacing intervention. In Campbell's description, the plans for sponsored radio seemed to work in the interests of American business. First of all, in the strictly economic field, he warned, "assuming the currency restrictions would prevent British manufacturers from paying an American company on the Continent for time on the air, then the sponsoring will be almost solely of American goods." Secondly, it could be politically dangerous: "there can be no guarantee that a commercial station would not be used - as in America - for political propaganda." Thirdly, foreign broadcasting represented a menace against national culture: "Undoubtedly, many of the American-type programmes are popular in this country. If continually plugged on the air they would add to the influence already gained by American films." As the newspaper proprietors recognized that commercial broadcasting could not be kept out of Europe, they proposed what was presented as an all-British solution to the reform of broadcasting. The idea was to establish a commercial station in the United Kingdom, responsible for the development of television. (The B.B.C. did not seem to have enough money
available to invest the necessary amount of capital.) Such an enterprise, Campbell more timidly mentioned, could be run on a non-profit basis by the Newspaper Proprietors Association itself; on which proposal he added: "I am including this confidentially as an indication of the serious view taken of the prospective American station." (171) The intimation was forwarded to Mr. Flett of the Office of the Lord President of the Council for an answer. He did not seem to take Campbell seriously, though, and refused to believe that Plugge could bankrupt the Sunday Pictorial or that American culture could have invaded Britain via the continental stations (172). The Communications and Broadcasting Division of the Ministry of Information felt more uncertain: "There have been so many far-reaching developments in the radio field that one is reluctant to dismiss any suggestion out of hand." The Minister of Information official agreed that American intervention in European broadcasting could hardly be prevented, at least on short waves, and that commercial broadcasting had come to stay, but thought it undesirable that the British press should control the new station. "In America, where they are less alive to the dangers of the manipulation of public opinion by a few wealthy newspapers' owners, there has been a strong movement in favour of restricting the operation of broadcasting stations by newspapers. I should have thought that it would be disastrous if the newspaper proprietors in this country were allowed so to monopolise the vehicles of opinion." (173) Eventually, Herbert Morrison, the Lord President of the Council, answered Stuart Campbell openly rejecting his proposal. But the new attitude of the newspaper proprietors was not accidental, nor occasional. While they clung to their opposition to commercial broadcasting, they also increasingly declared that if that was to be accepted, they would have claimed "the right ... to take part in the running of it." (174)

On one point the information given by Campbell seems to have been accurate enough. From a purely numerical point of view, the advertising agencies which were in favour of commercial broadcasting were by far a minority. In October
1946 Col. W. A. Bristow, President of the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, wrote to the Regional Director of the Telecommunications stating his association's view on the matter. It was true that before the war a Radio Advertising Committee had been formed within the Society to discuss wireless advertising. "Since the war, however," he continued, "conditions have entirely changed and we can think of nothing that would justify us in resuming or attempting to resume these foreign broadcasts." According to Col. Bristow, the standard of reception had got much worse after 1945 while the B.B.C. programmes were becoming increasingly popular. Furthermore, he stated, the advertisers, interviewed through a questionnaire, had declared that they were happy enough with their existing market shares and that they saw no reason to spending large amounts of money on advertisements from a foreign station. "To summarise the matter at this stage," Bristow bluntly declared, "I would say that personally I am dead against it [the radio enthusiasm of some of the members], and my Committee and Members are well aware of my views, and certainly the I.S.B.A. is no supporter of wireless advertising." However, he added, "in course of time, if and when conditions change, the manufacturers of this country may come to you and ask you to consider the establishment of a British Commercial Broadcasting System, for which there are more reasons than appear on the surface." (175)

Gradually, therefore, the idea that a separate commercial system might co-exist with the B.B.C. began to emerge along with the progressive awareness that the introduction of a degree of commercialism in broadcasting did not necessarily imply the adoption of the American system of sponsorship.

But the actual implementation of such a novelty still lay further ahead. In the late 1940s the private interests' situation was still very much the same as it was described by Brendan Bracken, Conservative Minister of Information, two years earlier, during the war. In July 1944 he had said: "The example of the U.S. shows that uncontrolled commercial broadcasting provide programs which are, in some respects, superior to those of the B.B.C." "But," he had immediately
added, "it is doubtful whether the commercial and advertising interests in this country are prepared to spend the large sums of money necessary to finance a full national service." (176) At the eve of the conclusive discussion which would have prepared the way to the break up of the B.B.C. monopoly, the pressures coming from the business world were still far from radical. Everybody seemed ready, keen, in fact, for a 'reasonable compromise.'

But Bracken emphasized also another important development which would have conditioned the eventual introduction of commercial television. Such being the state of British business, he warned, if advertising was introduced in broadcasting, "it is also possible that commercial broadcasting might fall into the hands of a single advertising company, which would provide a service with all the disadvantages of a monopoly, but none of the advantages of a chartered corporation." (177)

2.4 - Lost Threads: Towards the 1948 Broadcasting Committee

The evidence presented in 1944 to the Woolton Committee by the Minister of Information could then but point at the disadvantages involved in the introduction of any form of radio advertising (or sponsorship). At the second meeting of the Committee, quite consistently with what had been saying about the lack of resources to finance a fully developed commercial broadcasting service, "The MINISTER of INFORMATION said that there was no reason to suppose that if the B.B.C. were permitted to give advertisements and sponsored programmes the standard of their programmes would improve. The giving of such programmes might raise political difficulties and there was a danger that the main types of products advertised would be foreign." (178)

His arguments must have sounded convincing to the Committee. In its draft report of February 1945 the question of financing seems rather positively settled along the lines suggested by Bracken: "The Corporation have never shown any desire to use the sponsored programmes," it declared, "and any attempt to do
so would certainly be resisted by such interests as the press and would probably be resented by a large body of public opinion." As far as the British public at large was concerned, it was more than a dangerous misunderstanding of the existing situation. While the B.B.C.'s unwillingness to introduce commercials (179) and the press opposition to commercial broadcasting were still out of question, recent opinion polls had shown that public opinion was divided almost exactly in two by the issue of commercial broadcasting. The Committee's conclusions would therefore seem more the product of an unimaginative political élite uninspired by the transformations which were in progress in its society than a careful picture of the developments in progress. However, something should be added to complete the picture. In fact, the Committee's conclusions did answer consistently to another sector of society, the politicians claimed. It was the business world, they reported, which was favouring a cautious and protectionist approach. "The only justification for adopting it [wireless advertising]," the War Cabinet Committee maintained, "seems to be that it would constitute an additional source of revenue, but we do not consider that the amount of revenue likely to be obtained by this means would outweigh the very real objections to its adoption in this country." (180) The possible introduction of a competitive system had then already been hinted at, as soon as the Woolton Committee was appointed, and alternative systems had been studied and to a certain degree, praised. But the crucial decisions were deferred while the Committee temporarily confirmed the validity of the monopoly and proclaimed itself against commercial broadcasting. (181) This comparatively swift conclusion however did not render justice to the complexities of the debate which had begun in 1943-44. Those lost tracks might help to clarify the weak points of that decision. They also show that the references to the American system were as popular as ever.

The parliamentary debate of June 19, 1944 had brought into the political limelight a widespread, generic dissatisfaction with the broadcasting monopoly,
a resentment which the cautious reactions of the cabinet cannot represent adequately. The foreseeable competition of continental stations; the low standard of B.B.C. entertainment programmes or the right for a freedom of information and opinion; the necessity to maintain the Corporation's External Service; the existence of technical devices which would have allowed for alternative programmes - all the main transformations which the war was introducing (or catalyzing) were evoked in the Commons and thoroughly examined. Furthermore, American broadcasting was once more cited as the well known viable alternative. Captain Gammans, future Assistant Postmaster General in the Conservative government which would introduce commercial television, well summarized the substance of the problems and in the face of the opposition of the Labour members (and of Aneurin Bevan, their spokesman on this occasion) asserted: "We are going to get commercial broadcasting in any case. You cannot put a tariff against the waves of the air ... before Members lightly condemn the method of the United States, they should study it ... and they would see the great advantage which results from having something more than a mere monopoly in this important service ... I think it is far better for us to allow commercial broadcasting ... for the reason that you will get that element of competition in broadcasting which, in my opinion, is essential." (182) Clearly, in Gammans' mind, the question to be discussed was not how to reform the B.B.C., whether it would be remunerative to introduce advertising or sponsorship. The matter was how and which other programmes should be allowed to start what was beginning to be called 'a healthy competition.'

Between October and November 1944, the Economist published a series of articles discussing "A plan for broadcasting." The starting point for the polemic was the "widely held" view (against which the periodical had already argued), "that there are only two ways in which broadcasting can be organized and financed. One is the way practised in Great Britain and in practically all European countries - that of a state-owned monopoly financed out of the proceeds
of licence duties on receiving sets. The other is the American way — of commercial broadcasting companies financing themselves, in competition, by "selling time" to advertisers." (183) Coming up against this bipolar vision, the author of the articles set off to discuss how to get rid of monopoly without surrendering to the American version of competitive broadcasting. After having considered the technical developments which would have rendered possible the introduction of alternative services, he explicitly wrote: "To many people, to plead for a competitive system of broadcasting is the same thing as asking for the American system of programmes 'sponsored' by advertisers. But that is not so in the least. Let it be made quite clear that these articles, in arguing for competition and variety, are not pleading the case of the advertiser." (184) In the last article of the series a scheme was put forward which envisaged a system of controlled competition among three broadcasting organizations very partially financed through advertising (under rigid control), the object being "to combine the best features of the American system (that is, the variety and liveliness induced by competition) with the best features of the British system (its freedom from advertising and sponsorship)." (185) At this point the discussion really opened up and all sorts of alternative national models were considered. (186) Opposition to the purely commercial system identified with America, however, remained strong. Canada, Australia, South Africa provided new experiences and the idea of a "duopoly" where private and public broadcasting could coexist began to gain support.

But the political debate developed also along specific lines, as it followed important transformations then in progress within the world of broadcasting. The technical development of very high frequencies, or ultra-short wavelengths, which had been going on during the war seemed in fact to render technically possible the multiplication of broadcasting services which those political proposals were envisaging. The utilization of the "new" air-waves (usually on Frequency Modulation) would have removed the main (technical)
conditioning factor which had been used to assert the necessity of a monopolistic control of the ether: the shortage of wavelengths. As a high B.B.C. official put it in 1952, "the one thing that could have made a radical change in the framework of British domestic broadcasting, if that had been desired, was Frequency Modulation or some other form of VHF transmission, which was capable not only of giving much better reception but of enabling far more separate programmes to be transmitted in one country." (187) A "Note on Frequency Modulation" reporting on the swift development of this new technique in the U.S.A. arrived on the desk of the Cabinet Committee on broadcasting as early as September 1944. Its potential anti-monopolistic implications were very clear from the start. In February 1945 a note from the Foreign Office to Woolton carefully anticipated future prospects on the basis of what was happening in the United States: "One of the strongest arguments in favour of monopoly has been that the very restricted number of channels available to us, in the medium wave bands, has demanded concentration of broadcasting in the hands of one organization. I strongly suspect that this argument will have lost much of its force even 5 years after the war, and that there will be room for a great variety of programmes, which a monopoly supported by licence fees will not be able to provide. Certainly this is what the Americans are planning for, as we have seen from the recent hearings of the Federal Communications Commission." (188) However, while the war was still going on, the discussion could not be brought to its ultimate consequences. The Cabinet decided to take a provisional stance against the introduction of alternative services, claiming that the problem of the shortage of wavelengths was still unsurmountable. It chose not to rule out the possibility of later changes and for the moment deferred it to the post-war years. The Woolton Committee had not managed to agree on a viable report on the future institutions of British broadcasting either. Meanwhile, voices were increasingly heard questioning the argument of the technical shortage of wavelengths to justify the monopoly, pointing at the existing
potentialities of wire broadcasting, (189) on one hand, and for the future, much
more promising exploitation of FM signals, on the other. While criticisms were
growing, along with the awareness of the necessity for a general reformulation
of the 1922 system, the discussion was delayed to blow up again in the aftermath
of war. Its impact upon the existing institutional arrangements could be hard.
"The introduction of broadcasting on very short waves," a Post Office high
official, would warn in 1946 is "bound to encourage the school of thought which
favours the introduction of an element of competition into U.K. broadcasting and
there might be renewed pressure for the introduction of a competitive system."
(190)

Widespread pressures in favour of the swift development of ultra-short
waves played a role in the discussion over the B.B.C. monopoly, which was to be
clamorously reopened immediately after the end of the war. On 26 June 1946, the
Times published a most astounding letter from Frederick Ogilvie, former Director
General of the B.B.C., arguing against the Corporation’s monopoly in rather
outspoken terms and urging for the introduction of competition to save the
remnants of freedom of opinion and speech. (191) If the peculiarity of Ogilvie’s
intervention could hardly be denied, coming as it did from a person who had been
identified with the B.B.C. management, it nevertheless represented only the most
resounding example of a more widespread public concern.

What is remarkable about the whole discussion is that, for the first time
in British broadcasting history, the principles established in 1922 were
radically contested by voices coming from within the establishment. While the
delicate discussion on the degree of development and perfecting of frequency
modulation was going on, less than a month after Ogilvie’s intervention, a
debate was taken up in a parliamentary Committee occasioned by a motion for a
grant-in-aid to be paid to the B.B.C. The B.B.C. Charter was due for renewal in
that very year and the Prime Minister had announced his intention to grant it
without any further inquiry. While the Labour party immediately took sides
against the introduction of commercial broadcasting and almost unanimously so, (192) the political consensus upon which the B.B.C. system was based and which cut horizontally across party allegiances began to crumble. Praises were sung about the service the Corporation had rendered during the war, both inside and outside Great Britain. Yet, ironically it was the very powerfulness of that contribution which forced reconsideration of the monopolistic choice: "What were doubts and fears in 1939," - the "unique influence which broadcasting exercises in the modern world" - Henderson Stewart declared opening up the debate in July 1946, "are now actual realities, as a result of six years of war." The B.B.C.'s own prestige was there to prove it. Such a pervasive means of influence, Stewart felt, could not be left to a monopoly any more. "I have never advocated commercial broadcasting," Stewart went on, "but I am bound to say that, after considering the arguments put forward in support of it now, in 1946, I feel it is worthy of re-examination. I think we take a complete insular and inexcusable view of our responsibilities if we say that, merely because the Sykes Committee turned it down 20 years ago as a nasty piece of work, therefore commercial broadcasting ought to be turned down today." (193) At that point, not unusually, a side-discussion was started off on merits and demerits of U.S. broadcasting institutions. Herbert Morrison, the Lord President of the Council, proceeded to confute Stewart's very assumption and denied that any changes had occurred which could have prompted to reconsider the commercial system; as a matter of fact, he supported his view by drawing up a most appalling picture of American programmes. "It is not for us to criticise the internal broadcasting systems of other countries," he said and set himself to criticise U.S. broadcasting, "but I must confess that nothing I have heard or read has convinced me that the American listener gets such consistently good entertainment as we do in this country." (194) In a rather long response, centered on the necessity for a fair evaluation of the American system, Brendan Bracken disputed such an idea: "Let me begin by saying that American broadcasting is often unfairly, not to say
maliciously, criticized," as, he felt, Morrison had done. However, this did not prevent him from talking about "some of the defects of sponsored radio" as reported in the most recent survey of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission. The picture which emerged, from the official investigation was indeed fearful enough to make him conclude "that we should not accept sponsored radio without a thorough inquiry into its work." (195) Rather interestingly, this time such a conclusion did not necessarily rescue the monopoly. It was in fact at this point that the idea that competition might be obtained through a system which did not imply commercial or sponsored programmes began to spread. Earlier polarities were to be abandoned and new ones invented. A certain degree of ambiguity was needed to get the best of both systems. (196) As Bracken had said, however, U.S. broadcasting was still worth more extensive and less biased inquiries.

For a couple of years the polemic went on along these lines. Then, in 1948, the resistance of the Labour government was worn down and a committee of inquiry was eventually appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Beveridge. (197) Its aim was to judge objectively the B.B.C. performance with a slight bias against monopoly. The approach was to be as open as possible. Its members travelled extensively and reported on different broadcasting institutions. The American system was once more attentively considered. Six different reports on broadcasting in the U.S. were presented to the Committee; two sub-committees visited the United States and Canada. (198) (The other two countries of which general surveys were drafted were Australia and New Zealand.) All that bulky material being accumulated and studied, as a general introduction to the survey on broadcasting in other countries, R. J. S. Baker, the Assistant Secretary to the Committee, declared: "The Committee has available a considerable volume of information about broadcasting in other countries but examination of it suggests that its value as the basis of any recommendations about broadcasting in this country is limited ... This information is interesting, but so much in these
countries is conditioned by special local circumstances, that it must be treated with great reserve when considering United Kingdom broadcasting problems ...

Neither in their technical nor their financial resources, nor in the availability of their local programme material are any of these countries comparable with the United Kingdom." "The U.S.A. broadcasting system," he continued, in particular, "is, among those about which we have detailed information, the most different from that of this country." (199)

Nevertheless, lip-service was paid to the importance of the American experience and the explicit condemnation of the Crawford Committee of 1925 was referred to and examined closely. While carefully listing failures and achievements of the American system, Beveridge's conclusions pointed at a model which might go beyond the U.S. experience: "The fault lies not in broadcasting being conducted competitively or as a business, but in the method in which it is financed by advertisers of other goods." (200) In fact, even the critics of the B.B.C. underlined their opposition to the introduction of a purely commercial system; among them, the Fabian Research Group, the Liberal Research Group, Mr. Geoffrey Crowther and Sir Robert Watson Watt were reported as advocating "a break up of the present Corporation essentially on functional lines ... Both groups desired to keep broadcasting as a public service and rejected full-scale competitive commercial broadcasting such as obtains in the United States." (201) Meanwhile, at cabinet level, the conviction was again gaining strength that, all in all, Britain had nothing to learn from America "in a field in which the Americans are so proud of their performance." (202)

Meanwhile, a few months before the Committee presented its report to Parliament, an important book was published which questioned the very foundations of the British broadcasting system. It was, according to the Economist, "the first authoritative and scholarly history of British broadcasting." (203) Its novelty resided mostly in the fact that for the first time that history was presented not as a natural development born out of natural
geographical conditions and traditional political attitudes but as a series of conscious decisions which adhered more closely to bureaucratic inclinations rather than to a supposed British genius. R. H. Coase, its author, an economist by training, had written the book for the London School of Economics series in September 1948. His aim, he claimed, was not "to come to a conclusion as to whether or not it is desirable that broadcasting should be organised on a monopolistic basis in Great Britain." (204) It had anyway the great advantage of making the problem clear: "I have shown that the technical arguments are incorrect, the arguments on grounds of finance unproven, and those on grounds of efficiency inconclusive. But, of course, the really important argument had been that a monopoly was required in order that there should be a unified programme policy. This argument is powerful and on its assumptions it is no doubt logical." (205) Coase's idea was to explain how the monopoly had come about, what had been its effects and what were the most commonly held opinions on broadcasting in Britain. However, by simply stating that "the problem to which a monopoly was seen as a solution by the Post Office was one of Civil Service administration. The view that a monopoly in broadcasting was better for the listener would come later" (206) it could be described as "a book which challenged the B.B.C. interpretation of history." (207) As such it was perceived as soon as it appeared. So high was the degree of sensitivity that it came to represent a most radical attack against the sacrosanct lib-lab principles embodied in the structure of the B.B.C. 

2.5 - Reactions of the B.B.C.

The B.B.C., while reacting strongly against these attacks, tried also to adapt itself to the new circumstances: it diversified its programme output and allowed for a larger share of popular programmes. As far as its very institutional organization was concerned, then, it started to acknowledge the monopoly's flaws. In June 1943, the Directors Général themselves, Robert Foot
and Cecil Graves, had warned the B.B.C. controllers and regional directors against the "known weaknesses which are inherent in a non-competitive organization." His worries went to the envisaged internal and foreign competition which would have started after the war. First of all, he stated, "radio manufacturers in the United States ... may be expected to produce cheap sets for sale in this country - sets which are capable of bringing in shortwave programmes at good strength and quality." To this the threatened "move on the part of some of the big commercial systems in the States to transmit sponsored programmes to this country" and the "even more likely threat of competition" of a national newspaper "opening up its own radio station across the Channel" had to be added. (208) Various surveys were conducted by the different departments and divisions on "post-war broadcasting." The Corporation officials were asked to set forth their views on the monopoly, the advertising/sponsorship option and the various reforms which were being discussed by publicists and politicians.

The widespread and open survey of criticisms and suggestions which followed revolved around the possibilities of comprehensive reorganization so as to answer the main criticisms. The setting up of a number of different services which would have appealed to different audiences was debated. "The idea of a 'popular' programme took fuller shape in 1943, with the main argument being advanced that a post-war B.B.C. would have to be able to compete successfully with 'sponsored programmes from our neighbours.'" (209) In December 1944, the B.B.C. Senior Controller, B. E. Nicolls opened a carefully studied note on "Post-War Home Programmes Set-Up" stating: "The objective is to allow the freest possible 'competition' within the B.B.C.'s monopoly ... The quotation marks imply a recognition of the fact that real competition must be based on complete freedom of action as well as on relative equality of money and other resources, but that the maximum competition possible in the circumstances of the B.B.C. is a political necessity."(210) The "maximum competition possible" was identified, in the circumstances of 1944-45 and immediately afterwards, with internal
competition between different programmes (the Light Programme was eventually started in July 1945 and it went alongside the Home Service and, after September 1946, the Third Programme) and the establishment of a certain degree of regional devolution as a means to a further democratization of the service. (211)

However, it was also felt that any improvement in the service, or a multiplication of services, would have implied increasing financial resources. While the politicians were examining it and ruling it out, also the B.B.C. was globally reconsidering the issue of advertising and sponsorship under this regard. In April 1943, the Director General boldly expressed his views on the question: in a Planning Directions Meeting, the minutes report, "he deprecated the suggestion that finance by sponsored programmes is inevitable, and asked that the general assumption should be that the B.B.C. should continue on a public service basis with the method of finance implied thereby." (212) However, in the discussion which followed, many voices were heard which proclaimed themselves in favour of the introduction of advertising. The Assistant Director of Publicity (Overseas) explicitly summed up the principal reasons which would have justified it and the system which could be envisaged: "If sponsoring of commercial firms or other people is a good way of bringing the best popular entertainment before the public, then it seems hard to rule it out for doctrinaire reasons. At the same time I feel most strongly that very much more control of sponsors and advertising is needed than has been allowed in America or than is exercised in the advertising columns of the press." (213)

Increasingly even high officials began to discuss in detail how to "get some benefit from sponsored programmes without the outstanding disadvantage which attaches to such programmes, namely that commercial interests and others virtually have to a very large degree control over programme content." (214) The problem then often took the form of a debate on how to enjoy the advantages of a commercial system without having to surrender to the well-known degenerations of American broadcasting. The solution could be "that all programmes of any kind
would be planned and produced by the B.B.C. exactly as they were before the war," there being "a fill-up period occupied by advertisers' announcements between a large number of the programmes." (215) In spite of the genuine interest the alternative financing methods were arousing (216) the discussion was cut short when substantial rumours spread that public financing would have been increased after the war so as to cover the expenses of the new programmes. (217)

Before and after the discussion on alternative financing methods, an original contribution to the debates which were engaging the B.B.C. staff at home came from overseas. Since 1934, the Corporation had its North American Representative, whose main tasks were to promote B.B.C. programmes and image and to keep an eye on American productions so as to send home interesting programmes and ideas. In January 1944, the North American Office of the B.B.C., based in New York, decided to prepare documentation on U.S. radio. The initiative was promoted by the North American Director himself. "It is not our aim to make a case against commercial radio," he clarified, "but to produce an objective study on what commercial radio is, how it works, where its controls lie, etc., so that basic facts may be available to people in Britain who at present regard commercial radio either as a dream or as a nightmare." (218) The steady flux of information on American radio programmes and industry, of which the North American Office was only a systematic example, would continue well after the war. It materialized in regular bulletins and equally regular visits of the staff to the United States.

At this point, the attitude of the B.B.C. towards America, the alerted eye it kept on it, had a twofold motivation. First of all, there was the internal logic of the medium which required international cooperation and exchange of ideas. When the Corporation started talking about regional devolution, the obvious 'model' to look at was the system evolved in America where local stations had a long story and strong attachments. The most interesting report on
the subject was written by Oldfield-Davies, a B.B.C. high official, in April-May 1949. The purpose of his visit to the United States and Canada had been "to enquire into local and regional broadcasting." His experience, however, had been rather disappointing. Everywhere he saw "little attempt to reflect or encourage local cultural activities." Even in the two stations where he found "an atmosphere more nearly akin to that prevailing in the B.B.C.," he concluded "there is little of what might be termed regional consciousness in their work ... The public service work of these large high-powered regional stations is much more an attempt to spread general information and culture than to mirror the activities of the region itself." A different language was being spoken, foreign to the British observer: "Local stations exist primarily for advertising and pay scant attention to any systematic reflection and cultivation of local or regional cultural activities. From what I saw in the United States and Canada, while local stations in Great Britain, with the development of F.M., would be an extremely useful means of improving the reception of existing B.B.C. programme services ... I do not think there is much advantage in thinking of setting up a chain of such stations to operate independently of existing services." (219)

In the second instance, there was the pressure of a political world which had always judged the B.B.C. against the competing performance of the American networks. When the Corporation was asked to present its case to the Beveridge Committee, the General Advisory Council submitted also a general overview of broadcasting in the United States and Canada. It was the result of a number of visits to American radio stations performed between the end of the war and 1947 by members of the B.B.C. staff. These trips had been precipitated by the intervention of the then Chairman of the B.B.C. Board of Governors, the Labour party member Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, who was denouncing the scarce dynamism and the anti-American bias of the broadcasting Corporation. As he recalled later, he was having "some difficulty in persuading Haley [the B.B.C. Director
General between 1944 and 1952 to send a number of senior officers to the United States to see what they could learn." (220)

Lord Simon’s statement might hold true insofar as Haley was concerned, but it hardly explains the amount of material the B.B.C. had been accumulating on U.S. radio well before his intervention. Indeed, immediately after the war the flux of B.B.C. officials either sent or voluntarily leaving for the United States must have reached unheard of proportions (221) and it could hardly be described as a mere response to political pressures. The specific aims of these missions had been to evaluate technical progress (especially in VHF and television) and systems of organization as well as standards of programmes. Among the visitors, the highest officials of the Corporation were counted, such as the Director of the Spoken Word, the Chief Engineer, the Controller Home Service, the Controller TV, the Head of Listener Research and their producers. The synthetic report which summarized the results of these trips comprised descriptions of single programmes and performances and attempted to render a complex picture of American broadcasting. However, it concluded: "It is unreal and unprofitable to try to equate the British and American broadcasting systems. In structure, in aims, in outlook, and in responsibilities they are too unlike."

The same had been said by the Director of the Spoken Word, George Barnes, in his report: one of the two things which impressed him about U.S. radio, he confessed, was "the difference of outlook. With us it is social and moral; with the Americans it is financial and legal. This makes very difficult the discussion of policy questions: the aims and the assumptions are dissimilar." (222) Yet, as a comparison was asked for, and it had in fact being one of the reasons which had urged them to visit the United States in the first place, "granted the difference in systems, comparisons can be made and conclusions can be drawn as to their results." However the main conclusion was still that the British system was without doubt the better. (223)
Again, Lord Simon denounced this widespread, self-complacent tendency of the B.B.C. officers. "With one or two conspicuous exceptions," he wrote about the staff visits to the United States, "the reports showed little signs of their writers having gone for the purpose of learning what U.S.A. radio did better than the B.B.C." (224) Yet Lord Simon himself did not seem to entertain a notably different attitude. Summing up the results of his trip to North America, which would have contributed substantially to the report presented to the Beveridge Committee, he wrote: "I went with high hopes ... And in spite of the very strong and general dislike of commercial broadcasting in B.B.C. circles, I went with an open mind ... It is all the more disappointing that on this occasion I do not think I have learnt one single thing that we can with confidence try to copy." (225)

No matter how detailed the knowledge of American broadcasting was growing, no matter how attentively their programmes and techniques were studied, British and American broadcasters still talked different languages. Listing the conclusions which he thought were to be drawn from the information collected on America, Lord Beveridge mentioned, first "the advantage for people in Britain of studying the United States system of broadcasting personally, in contact with broadcasters and with critics of broadcasting in the United States ... The two fundamental contrasts between the two countries are that broadcasters in the States conduct their work under different financial conditions and in competition with one another rather than with a monopoly." Accordingly, "the second conclusion to be drawn from this study of American broadcasting," he went on, "is in my mind and the minds of most of the Committee who visited the United States, conviction of the importance of maintaining for Britain the present system of financing the costs of broadcasting either wholly or predominantly by licence fees paid by the listeners rather than by advertisement revenue derived from sponsors." (226) As William Haley put it, "in our British wisdom we decided
on the ... way of broadcasting, where broadcasting is a non-commercial service
and in which every listener, no matter where he is in the United Kingdom, has an
equal right with every other listener to the best service he can be given."
(227) Beveridge had added that each country should all the same keep a close eye
on the other, as those very differences could inspire ideas which otherwise
would be kept out of either system, and that broadcasters of both countries
could effectively learn from each other "in proportion as they are not
continually on the defensive or offensive against one another;" (228)
Lord Beveridge's statements seem to summarize perceptively the main
features which characterized the relationship of the B.B.C. with American
broadcasting almost since the very beginning of the history of broadcasting: an
obsessive, professionally wise, interest accompanied by the feeling that, owing
to basic differences in outlook, not much could be imported from the United
States to the British Isles.

2.6 - B.B.C. Monopoly in Sound Broadcasting Confirmed

By 1948 the situation which had seemed to precipitate during the war had
changed enormously. One by one, the menacing threats which had been seen
approaching seemed to vanish. The expected competition from advertising stations
overseas did not materialize. "Far from launching commercial radio in Europe,
the Americans seemed to be primarily concerned with radio as a means of
propaganda ... The European governments themselves were in no hurry to let their
radio pass out of their own hands." (229) The Beveridge report showed that the
political world was still very much in favour of the monopoly. Sound
broadcasting had been diversified and the B.B.C. combination of Home Service,
Light Programme and Third Programme could now be considered again as the best
system in the world. The convulsions of the post-war uncertain perspectives
vanished while the established institutions of British society regained
confidence and legitimacy.
Yet, important questions had been left open and delicate problems were still waiting for a viable solution. The tensions which the war had introduced in political life and the new forces which unforeseen developments had then set in motion did not disappear overnight. In May 1949, the British Institute of Public Opinion reported that 51% of the U.K. citizens interviewed were still in favour of a maintenance of the B.B.C. monopoly; three years later the percentage had fallen to 47; by then, 39% of those interviewed declared themselves in favour of a mixed B.B.C.-commercial broadcasting system. Something less than in 1946 (when the percentage had reached the peak of 43%), but still much more than in 1949 (when it was 33%). (230) Asa Briggs has accurately described how swiftly the Beveridge Report was surpassed by events. When it was presented to Parliament for discussion, in 1951, it was already wholly out of date. Powerful forces in favour of the introduction of commercial television had been gaining support in influential circles. The Conservative Party was establishing its own Broadcasting Policy Committee (which became a reference point in the campaign in favour of commercial television) and within the government departments the increasing costs of the setting up of television and the improvement of the sound broadcasting services were seen with growing impatience. (231)

It was television which was going to play a crucial role in the breaking up of the existing system. The London television service was resumed in June 1946. The first provincial station (near Birmingham) was opened in December 1949. By that time, the pressure for a further expansion of the service was gaining momentum. It came from the manufacturers of television sets, eagerly waiting for an expansion of their market, and from an audience which was listening to reports on television developments abroad (notably, in the United States). It was being urged in Parliament, in the press, by the interests most directly involved. The arguments set forth to defend the case of an expansion went from the showing off of British enterprise in radio and television (and the fall in prices that an expanded market could generate), to the defence of those who were
paying an increased licence and did not get any particular advantage out of it. To these, the Post Office and the Ministry of Supply added the strategical importance of the electronic industry for defence. In November 1949, when the Postmaster General presented to Parliament the B.B.C. plans for an expansion of the television service, he stressed a crucial point: "The provision of a nationwide television service," he warned an audience, and an electorate, who was still experiencing rationing, "is being pushed ahead as fast as national economics permit." (232) Increasingly, however, there were those who began to wonder whether the national economy could indeed afford much more than the government was claiming. In January 1951, when public interest in television was dramatically increasing, Hugh Gaitskell, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, explicitly clarified, in a letter to the Labour MP, Edward Ness, what the government vision on the issue could be: "It cannot be disputed," he asserted, "that a larger television service is an inessential item in our investment programme, while the provision of television sets for the home market - as well as new and more glorified radios - is just the kind of things we have got to give up if the defence programme is to be carried through and exports maintained at an adequate level." (233) In spite of the government programme to keep down the request for television sets, in less than three years the television service had hundreds of thousands of viewers. And the swift development of the comparatively new technique could not be arrested. Very soon television became a central element in the lives of most people. The time was coming when new resources would have to be summoned to expand it. The business world was getting ready to provide for it. Meanwhile, the 1951 elections changed the political scene in a direction which would prove unfavourable to the B.B.C. monopoly. If the Cabinet was not particularly eager to urge for a change, it found also unsuitable to resist changes too strongly. The incoming coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, expected in June 1953, would show that the issue could not be postponed any further. The public felt everybody should be acknowledged the
right to see, on television, the regal ceremony. The authorities viewed it as an occasion and a duty. In October 1952 permission was granted for the building up of two new stations (temporary), so that 80-85% of the population would be covered - "in comparison with 40-45% in the United States." (234) The expansion of television was starting. No government could any more ignore it, either because of the business world pressures or because it realized how effective an instrument of political persuasion it was neglecting.

2.7 - The British Way to Commercial Television

If the novelties of television, its technical achievements began to be fully understood only in the early 1950s; if it can be true that the B.B.C. monopoly "break up was the result of new economic and political forces" as "there were more things to sell in 1954 and 1955, and advertisers were ready to sell them" (235) - the whole story, however, had begun, and grown more and more dramatic, during the war.

British wisdom apart, in the late 1930s-early 1940s the establishment and running of a television service rested upon a fundamental ambiguity. On one hand, pre-war developments had shown that until it had developed so that it could appeal to large masses of people, commercial interests were not willing to invest money in it, as the comparative situation in Britain and the United States before 1939 would seem to show. On the other, the very large costs the B.B.C. was incurring to maintain a television service were prompting the cabinet to reconsider the question of financing and try to envisage a system to attract private money. Given the difficulty to deal with this ambiguity within the existing system, it appeared very soon that the issue of television was bound to foster an even more open debate over the basic tenets of British broadcasting.

When the Hankey Committee on television developments first met in September 1943, everybody had it very clear that large amounts of money had to be invested in television development if a mass audience was to be reached. However, it was
more or less at the same time that television potentialities as an advertising medium (or a political persuader) were becoming evident. If R.C.A. in America awaited the end of the war to re-tool its plants and produce television sets, "a 1944 survey of leading [American advertising] agencies had shown that half already had television departments." (236) At the beginning of 1944 the B.B.C. Head of Research Department, H. L. Kirk, reported that in television, not less than in sound broadcasting, "there are certain factors which are different from those in this country. It is probable," he expectedly added, "that television stations in the U.S.A. will be commercially operated." (237) If developments in Britain were not as advanced, it was all the same very clear that the first problem to be solved would be the question of re-starting a television service after the war which would reach as large an audience as possible. The members of the newly appointed committee would have to consider how to guarantee reception at least to the larger centres of population, how to encourage research and development, and furnish "guidance to manufacturers especially with regards to exports." (238) The main technical problem the Committee was asked to solve was whether it would have been advisable to switch from the pre-war 405-line system of definition to the American system (525-line). It eventually decided to maintain the pre-war system and stated that technically "the difference between the pictures by the American and British system is indistinguishable to the naked eye." Furthermore, "the switch to the American system would involve considerable delay in re-starting the television service." (239) The decision was taken also on the basis of a careful evaluation of export possibilities. The Committee discarded as unrealistic the claim that British manufacturers could have exported television sets to the United States if they had adopted the same line definition. It therefore accepted the manufacturers' request to be left free to produce as soon as possible cutting short all vague perspectives of future markets. (240)
The Hankey Committee had not been asked to consider alternative methods of financing. Given the recent developments and the perspective of further expenditures, however, it could not avoid doing so. Before the war, the Treasury was growing restless over the question of the increasing investments in television. (241) Indeed, the possibility to envisage the introduction of commercial television had been seriously considered within the cabinet. As Briggs put it, insofar as the government's attitude was concerned, "had there been no war in 1939, it is conceivable that commercial television would have come to Britain fifteen years before it did." (242) Whether it was because war had eventually come or because the private interests which would have had to finance the new system were not ready yet, however, the partial break-up of the B.B.C. monopoly had to wait for another fifteen years. In 1943 the Hankey Committee repeated its opposition to commercial television, (243) at least provisionally.

As a matter of fact, the issue was hardly settled. So when, in November 1945, a new Television Advisory Committee was appointed, (244) the same discussion re-started which would have resulted in the eventual introduction of commercial television nine years later. (245) In July 1946 the Committee declared that it was necessary to obtain "full information on television developments abroad, particularly in the United States, and has asked the B.B.C. representative in the United States to submit periodical reports." (246) American broadcasting industry, it was felt, could have something to teach. First of all, given the slow change of attitudes which was taking place, it was important to be kept up-to-date regarding recent evolutions in commercial broadcasting; secondly, U.S. industry was clearly taking the lead on technical matters.

Consistently, in November 1946 the Committee reported to the Postmaster General elaborating upon these two issues. "The B.B.C. representative," it related, "has stated that in America 'the radio industry is in a state of
chaos. Technical developments are diverse and the information about them confused by the rival vested interests of (a) the C.B.S. which is pressing forward with colour television ..., and (b) the N.B.C. ... which maintains that colour on the mechanical system will not be practicable ... To sum up, it may be considered that the U.S.A. is making considerable theoretical and technical progress with television ... but on the practical side of putting out a public television service it is behind this country."

Free competition might have brought chaos back into the American system; but it would not prevent the United States from conquering the world leadership in television. "The complete concentration of the radio industry in this country in the war effort," the committee regretted, "was entirely right, but this country is now faced by the considerable achievements of television engineers in America, France and Germany." As always, however, the confrontation with America immediately extended to the conditions and states of mind of the leading business groups involved in the matter.

The manufacturers of television sets had won their battle to have a positive, official declaration that the present line definition system would be maintained, so that the public could be reassured and buy the television sets, and seemed to be busy with taking advantage of it. In general, they were in favour of a second channel, "but their collective view ... was uncommittal on the question of how, and by whom, the additional service should be run." Meanwhile, other sections of the business world were elaborating their strategies on television and proposing their plans. While advertising agencies continued in their moderate but clear pressures in favour of commercial television, a new sector was emerging which was aggressively attempting to break up the B.B.C. monopoly in an unsensational, but very effective, way. In the Fall of 1946, the Television Advisory Committee carefully considered the film industry's demand that reception of television programmes be permitted in cinemas. If the plan had no practical future, it was significant as a possible
open infringement of the B.B.C. monopoly. It also testifies to the increasing financial attractiveness of television: in September 1946 Garro Jones commented "that the film interests must either be of the opinion that the development of television might damage their interests, or that there were financial advantages in developing their own television system. He was inclined to think that the latter was the dominating factor." (251) Such an interpretation is supported by the film interests' increasing aggressiveness to enforce their proposal. At the beginning of 1947, Mr. Rank, the industry's spokesman, asked the government to allow the film interests to originate televised live programmes substantially in competition with the B.B.C. "Mr. Rank said that the film industry would be in a much better position to carry out experiments than the public service whose initiative would be cramped by too much supervision and Parliamentary criticism making it less ready to take risks. He himself was putting a lot of money into the development of cinema television." (252) The Treasury declared itself in favour of making concessions to the business representatives, who, the department's officials felt, would work more efficiently to make the television service more accessible to the general public. (253) In the late 1940s, the potentialities of home viewing were not fully appreciated and the provision of an alternative "public" showing sounded more appealing than one would have expected judging by later events. All in all, the Committee agreed with the Treasury representative that the request to have live television transmissions was legitimate, but, given the limited financial resources which the B.B.C. could draw upon, it was also determined not to allow free competition on the televising of outside events - as opposed to theatrical performances and films. (254) Further pressure in favour of the film interests came from Garro Jones himself. He significantly declared himself in favour of the maintenance and protection of the public service, but proclaimed "the wish of the B.B.C. to prevent entry of the cinema industry to the expanding service of television ... politically untenable and ... economically unsound." (255) To his two arguments,
political and economic, a third could be added as the necessity for much larger investments to produce good entertainment programmes was increasingly being called upon to justify the break-up of the B.B.C. monopoly.

The Beveridge Committee also considered the issue. The various reports with which it was presented dealt extensively with the question of commercial broadcasting and television in the United States. The B.B.C. memorandum on American broadcasting entailed a paragraph on "The Impact of Television." It told the story of the beginning of a great boom and while criticizing the standard of programmes, it warned: "The greatest enterprise will be needed by all concerned with British television — B.B.C., scientists, artists, research workers, and industry — if the position which this country has established for itself in the field of television is to be maintained." (256) Ironically, however, the same argument which the B.B.C. was using to ask for more money and greater investments could be turned against the Corporation; the call for an extraordinary financial effort might in fact have implied, in cabinet circles, that private resources were needed to integrate public investments. The supporters of commercial television maintained on various occasions that a satisfying television service, which could compete with the U.S. industry, could only be set up if money from the private sectors was put into it. (257)

This did not imply that an American "model" was to be followed. On the contrary, when putting forward their arguments, the enemies of the B.B.C. monopoly professed not only their willingness to fight the economic predominance of their American counterparts but also their determination not to follow in their footsteps insofar as the organization of the new service was concerned. Selwyn Lloyd, a Conservative M.P., member of the Beveridge Committee, who was the author of a minority report in favour of the introduction of commercial television, constitutes a significant example of such an attitude. "In spite of the difficulties of creating a public service network in the U.S.A.," he maintained in his report, "I think that much criticism of U.S.A. radio would be
damped down if there was a public service network providing a first class news service, controlling educational broadcasts, catering for remote areas and giving a first class programmes designed to sustain public taste, to give good entertainment and to ensure discussion of public issues." (258) What Lloyd was saying was that "much criticism of U.S. radio would be damped down" if an American B.B.C. existed, if its values and aims were introduced in U.S. broadcasting and consistently upheld. In fact, for a few years, perhaps up to 1949-1950, British observers had thought that American television might disown commercial broadcasting principles and adopt a 'more reasonable' B.B.C.-like attitude. In December 1948, a B.B.C. internal report to the Director General still wondered whether Americans could be so inconsiderate as to fail to take advantage of the introduction of the new medium to change their system. By then it was already clear that no technical impediment could further slow down the advent of television. "If the only way to 'sell' television is to manufacture television sets at 100 dollars each, I am quite sure," the B.B.C. official was saying, "that within the minimum of time television sets will be manufactured for 100 dollars each." However, "it is when one considers questions connected with the responsibility for policy that one finds oneself in troubled waters." No sign could be found of a likely conversion. "In response of my enquiry as to whether they thought either Congress or the F.C.C. would take the opportunity offered by the emergence of this new medium, to impose on the industry some standards of a nature familiar to the B.B.C. in the fields of public service, public morality and public responsibility," the B.B.C. report went on, "almost without exception hard headed people in radio replied no." (259) Once again, the British were to "discover" that the American and the English paths were divergent, and the two languages structured and established.

A year later, in September 1949, Herbert Morrison, a leading figure in the line-up in defence of the B.B.C. monopoly and its performance in television, would declare at the opening of Radiolympia exhibition: "Before the war we led
the world in television. During the war our television research had to be put on one side while our scientists and engineers turned their attention to the development of radar equipment. But now since the war a modern television service is being planned and developed in close consultation between the government, the B.B.C. and the industry, and if we are to believe a lot of independent evidence, the pictures sent out from Alexandra Palace are as good today as any to be seen in any television service in the world." (260)

However, they were not good enough, if quality played a part in it, to silence the interests which were organizing the final battle against the B.B.C. monopoly in television. Their aim was to create a new powerful advertising medium which could perform, in the different conditions, a role more similar to the one that broadcasting played in the United States. That American developments could not be overlooked appeared evident. In fact, within the B.B.C. no less than in political circles, "the United States were thought of as a necessary destination [for people studying television developments] largely because of the 'bigness' of television there and because of the 'zip and zest' associated with it." (261) Oddly enough, however, a distaste for the American system was shared by the most fervent supporters of the introduction of commercial television - as it was indirectly shown by Selwyn Lloyd's observations. The campaign against the B.B.C. monopoly in television which started in the early 1950s had strong anti-American (or un-American) tones. Two motives recurred in the parliamentary debates which preceded the vote on the Independent Television Act: on one hand, the idea that commercial television had not to be as bad as American television; and on the other that in order to prevent American cultural (and economic) domination it was necessary to let private concerns invest in broadcasting. "I am not impressed by analogies from the United States," Sir D. Maxwell Fyfe declared in the course of a parliamentary debate on the renewal of the B.B.C. Charter in 1952, "we have our
typical British way of resolving problems of taste, just like any other problem. We are a much more mature and sophisticated people." (262)

In a rather controversial book on pressure group politics in Britain, H. H. Wilson has described at length circumstances, ideological commitments and practical involvements of the main characters of the story of the introduction of commercial television in Britain. The Conservative backbenchers who led the battle in the early 1950s, he states, were spokesmen for powerful economic interests, such as "the radio television manufacturing industry, major American and British advertising agencies, and financial institutions." (263) Their ideology entailed a new political vision; it was, in Wilson's words, an early version of the idea of "popular capitalism," a "cynical, pseudo-egalitarianism" which, according to Wilson, "replaced an older commitment to the maintenance of national standards." Throughout the controversy which preceded the passing of the Independent Television Act in 1954, he maintained, "it was apparent that the commercial advocates were contemptuous of efforts to uphold either cultural or intellectual standards; the decisive consideration was that television was a great marketing device." (264) To make it acceptable to the Conservative establishment, in spite of all its resemblance to the American model, the standard pro-commercial television argument was dressed up in anti-American, nationalist, rhetoric. "As a medium for advertising" (it is again Maxwell Fyfe speaking in 1952), "television offers certain advantages over the sound programmes. It may prove to be the way in which sponsoring can earn its revenue and acclimatise itself to British taste, which is quite different from American taste, in a field where British taste is still in a formative stage." (265) The argument was also used to answer the charges which the defendants of the monopoly were launching against them. In a memorandum on "Broadcasting: Some Counter-Arguments against Those who Uphold the Monopoly," considered by the Television Advisory Committee in May 1952, the dualism monopoly-Americanism is rejected and the standard line of defence set forth which was being and would be
repeated over and over again both before and after the eventual introduction of "independent television." "A popular argument has been," it reported, "that if the monopoly is broken in any way the American form of broadcasting and television will follow in this country." The mixed systems which were operating in the Dominions were recalled as effective compromises between the "two extremes." Britain could then follow that path, and rediscover its traditional attitude to compromise: "There are good grounds for believing that in the United Kingdom we could also develop a compromise, avoiding the pitfalls of the American system. British taste differs radically from American taste and there is no indication that because you allow greater freedom you would obtain what critics in England are inclined to call 'American excesses.'" (266) While the opponents of commercial television vigorously denied that a commercial system could be introduced which did not bring about the same horrors that American television had inflicted upon American society, (267) the supporters of the break-up of the B.B.C. monopoly proclaimed that the natural Britishness of the British people did not need governmental, or public, supervision. "I think it is unfair to keep comparing what happens in America to what might happen here," John Profumo, Conservative M.P., one of the leaders of the movement in favour of commercial television, would assert, "their standards are entirely different to our own ... I have every confidence in the taste and common sense of the British public in being able to choose their own entertainment without help from the politicians." (268)

During the Summer of 1953 the opponents of commercial television seemed to be winning the battle on the media. In June the well prepared ceremony of the coronation of Elizabeth II was broadcast on television. The B.B.C. had been working for more than a year to assure a dignified transmission. The Corporation had the exclusive right to televise the event and struggled fiercely to ensure that no unauthorized image would be diffused. Meticulous agreements were concluded with the American networks to enforce the B.B.C. sole right.
Expectations were high in the United States and the expected audience for the transmission impressive. Given all this, given the arrangements with which the press had engaged itself for months, and the obvious interest that the event aroused in Britain, when the news spread that an American television station had interrupted the coronation programme with "unsuitable" commercials, the opponents of commercial television were provided with what looked like a final opportunity to illustrate the quality of commercial broadcasting. The debate raged for weeks. The controversial commentaries inserted by the U.S. networks, criticizing the imperial grandeur of the ceremony, were denounced as unacceptable; and the chimpanzee, called J. Fred Muggs, which "in the middle of the Communion Service ... was solemnly asked 'Do they have a Coronation where you come from?'," (269) stigmatized as utterly outrageous.

All sorts of dubious things were said to stir up popular feelings against American broadcasting which was expediently identified with commercial television. Public indignation seemed to reach a peak; but it remained on the surface of the problems then debated concerning the reform of broadcasting institutions. The debate on American television had gone much beyond that. The dissatisfaction with the B.B.C. monopoly encouraged to think in more positive terms of commercial television. After all, everybody was saying, it does not have to be as bad as that. It can remain "British".

A few months before the eventual passing of the act which would have introduced independent television, Mr. Gammans, the Conservative Government Assistant Postmaster General and a convert to commercial television, declared: "I think ... that there are no longer any fears that because we propose to introduce a system of television financed by advertisements, we must inevitably follow the American pattern." To which he added: "There is one requirement to which even at this early stage we attach great importance ... It is to ensure that what is put on the air is predominantly British in character ... We are determined to take care to preserve the British character of the programmes and
to protect the interests of our artists and producers." (270) This was exactly what the B.B.C. had been doing in sound broadcasting (271) and was trying to apply to television: keeping a close eye on American programmes so as not to miss interesting ideas while endeavouring to preserve a peculiar national quality, whether it could be actually viable or even only rhetorically maintained. (272)

Meanwhile, the idea was spreading within the Conservative party, which was split on the issue of commercial television, that an "acceptable British compromise was possible." (273) In August 1953, the Postmaster General declared that "the Government did not intend to adopt the American system of dependence on sponsoring." (274) The parliamentary debate which followed the publication of a White Paper on broadcasting in November 1953 (275) concluded on a vote in favour of the introduction of an "independent" television service. Many authors have stressed the cautious nature of the new system. The fierce battle of 1952-53 resulted in what has been described as a "typically British" compromise, where allowance is made to new forces while at the same time carefully protecting established institutions and approaches. The Independent Television Act only partially altered the inter-war years model. It sanctioned the end of the B.B.C. monopoly - but only for television. It allowed for the existence of private networks which would be financed through advertising revenues - but under the monopolistic control of a single authority. It introduced competition in the field of television programmes - but under the strict supervision of a body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority which resembled closely the B.B.C. Board of Governors, in composition and outlook. It did not touch in any way the B.B.C. itself which remained a public corporation financed through licence fees. On the contrary, it took it as an organizational model for commercial television.

Furthermore, the Independent Television Act, if it did not establish a "statutory quota for foreign imports," in spite of the pressure of the film
industry, it nevertheless "spoke ... of 'proper proportions' of matter of 'British origin and performance.' Interpretation and application was to be left to the judgement of the Authority." (276) The controlled opening up to the market forces was seen as compatible with the defence of British culture (as Gammans had said) which had so far been embodied, in broadcasting, in the B.B.C. In the politicians' mind, both systems, the B.B.C. and I.T.A., would have to elaborate a policy where a mixture of attention towards the audience preferences (which could imply an Americanization of the programmes) would be balanced by the traditional defence of the Britishness of programme content. (277)

In 1958, in a public address on independent television in Britain, Robert Fraser, the Director General of the Independent Television Authority, reassured its audience about the Britishness of commercial television. Having described what the main difference was between the B.B.C. and the Independent Television programme companies, he added: "But there is also a radical difference between this system and private enterprise television in the United States and Australia. In the British system, no programmes are supplied, as in America and Australia they are nearly all supplied, by a succession of advertisers. The general programme policy is supplied by the Authority, and the programmes themselves are devised and produced and presented by the programme companies ... I do not think it possible to exaggerate the importance of this distinction between control by an editor and control by advertisers, or the degree to which it has contributed to the standing and social responsibility of British independent television." (278)
If it seems at least objectionable to define the opposition between the British and the American broadcasting systems as an opposition between a public service and a commercial system, as the British mythology has often claimed, it remains to be determined whether the American claim holds true that the U.S. system was more democratic insofar as it was built upon a supposedly greater responsiveness to audience preferences. The B.B.C. repeatedly rejected this charge. In the special issue of the Listener prepared to "make an accurate picture" of British broadcasting which in the United States was being "subjected to distorsion," the B.B.C. weekly confidently stated: "British broadcasting has the advantage of existing solely to serve the public, without any intermediaries in the form of shareholders, manufacturers, salesmen or advertising agents" (contrarily to American broadcasting, the article implied). "It is financed by those whom it serves. Every household that takes out a wireless licence becomes in effect part owner of the enterprise" (but it had no choice as the payment of the licence fee which represented its share was enforced by law). "The policy of setting out to 'give the public what it wants'" (as the U.S. broadcasting policy had often been epitomized) "usually involves the dangerous fallacy of underestimating the public's intelligence. It is surely better to err in the other direction. Errors there will be. A new instrument is being handled, a new technique developed. Not perfection or anything like it, is here claimed ... Only slowly can there be built up that vital co-operation between a broadcasting service and its listeners which enables it to function as a constructive agency of democracy." This was the standard B.B.C. answer to those who criticized its vague relationship with its audience and questioned the effectiveness of the channels it had granted its listeners to express their feelings.
It would seem therefore that attitudes towards audience research might function as a cultural detector. Once more a typically British approach to audience preferences was compared with the American. This time, however, it was almost exclusively a professional debate. The discussion on listener research leads right to the heart of the B.B.C. (283)

So the debate over the desirability of an audience research service is interesting mainly as an indicator of the professional broadcasters' attitude towards the public. Clearly it would be much more hazardous to infer from it the exact degree of closeness between the broadcasting organization and its audience — a far more confused and diffused relationship than the number of investigations into listening habits would describe.

3.1 - Giving the Public What We Think They Need, and Not What They Want: Before 1936

A marked characteristic of the educational approach which permeated the history of the B.B.C. was the particular vision it entailed of the relationship with the audience. (284) "Sir John Reith," Maurice Gorham would write, "was known to be strongly opposed to 'counting of heads', or ascertaining the tastes and habits of listeners and trying to meet them in the broadcast programmes." Between 1922 and 1936 the B.B.C. did not collect any systematic data on audience response to its programmes. "It is hard now to realize," Gorham goes on, "how little the pre-war planners of British broadcasting knew about what happened to the programmes they put out. They had no means of knowing factually when listeners listened or what they listened to, much less what they liked." (285) As late as 1934 a popular radio weekly "devoted to the entertainment side of broadcasting" and completely independent of the B.B.C. lamented the scarce attention which the Corporation devoted to listeners' preferences and the "dignity business" which seemed to absorb most of the professional broadcasters' energies: "the atmosphere of the B.B.C.," it regretted, "seems to engender a
kind of county council atmosphere, instead of a large studio existing for the sole purpose of entertainment." (286)

It would be wrong to conclude that no popular programmes were produced, or that the B.B.C. was utterly and happily out of touch with its audience. It has frequently been said that the problem was that the B.B.C. did not seem very interested in knowing exactly how many people listened to how many programmes as its "responsibility was to its own high standards and not to public taste or demand." (287) This seems only partially true. If an undercurrent feeling of mistrust towards quantitative measurement undoubtedly existed, if the resistance against the possibility that listeners could directly influence the programmes was widespread and adamant, the B.B.C.'s officials were also fully aware that the Corporation very existence depended upon its ability to attract audiences and efficiently perform the role the parliament had entrusted to it. (288)

"There were odd sources of information that cast occasional light," Gorham recalls. "The B.B.C. received some guidance from comment by Press critics, which was officially ignored but often eagerly awaited by staff producers as well as outside performers ... The B.B.C. had its own letters from listeners" (in fact, the Programme Correspondence Section was entirely devoted to the correspondence with listeners). However, "apart from ... accidental sources, the verdict on the success or failure, popularity or unpopularity of individual programmes depended on the opinions of the senior staff, buttressed by those of their friends and acquaintances ... The opinion of the lower classes were deduced mainly from the comments of charwomen, gardeners, taxi-drivers, and commissionaires." (289) The opinion of experts and advisory bodies was also relied upon and explicitly requested. All in all, however, the overall picture which the B.B.C. gathered was clearly socially limited, or "distorted." (290) Incidentally, the first B.B.C. official in charge of audience research, Robert Silvey, upon his arrival at the Corporation "noted that one of the first effects of listener research was the shocking - to Corporation mandarins - discovery that the world at large
dined before eight p.m.," (291), a typically lower middle class habit. Up to the late 1930s, however, the audience itself was socially limited. In Silvey's words, "'in those days, the people who had wireless sets were not a cross-section of the whole population, it was a section of the population which had a pretty strong middle-class bias.'" (292)

A part from its more or less realistic social characterization, the guidance offered to the B.B.C. programme planners before 1936 was very far from giving any reliable quantitative information. It was based upon intuitive conceptions of listeners which could occasionally prove accurate but that could hardly be relied upon as an efficient professional device.

The idea of a more systematic investigation into listeners' preferences was strongly advocated at the beginning of 1930 by the future Head of the Drama Department, then Productions Director, Val Gielgud and by Charles Siepmann, then Director of Talks. (293) "Even before that," Briggs recounts, "the members of the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education had been pressing for the appointment of a 'salaried investigator.'" (294) As soon as June 1930 "it was decided in Programme Board to get Heads of Departments to set down the questions which they would particularly like answered if an experimental survey of some district or districts were undertaken." (295) In August, the Listener reported "the invention by a Fellow of Columbia University, New York, of a 'gadget' for measuring the reaction of listeners to wireless programmes" which, the B.B.C. weekly stated "should prove useful over here, if the schemes which are being considered for a statistical survey of the tastes of British listeners come to fruition." This was in fact the big news: the Corporation was announcing a forthcoming extensive referendum among its listeners. "A substratum, at least, of statistical facts is most desirable for any investigation of listeners' tastes," the Listener wisely stated. Yet, even more wisely, it added: one "must be careful not to fly too directly in the face of the ingrained suspicion of exact and comprehensive statistics, assembled in the most scientific way, which
many a Briton instinctively feels," (296) or, at least, many a Briton who happened to be part of the B.B.C. senior staff. Anyway, once more there was something particularly British which ought to be taken into account. Another peculiarity should be pointed out. As Briggs had noted, the experimental survey that the Listener was announcing "was first mooted in the particular interests of Adult Education." This would seem to strengthen the idea of a contrasting inspiration which opposed the British and the American approach to audience measurement. Briggs maintains that it was rooted in their very beginnings. Of the increasing interest in listening habits showed by the B.B.C. in the early 1930s, he writes: "whereas in the United States listener research began as a branch of market research ... in Britain the first pressures came from people who wanted to develop educational programmes." (297) A further difference between the two systems could probably be inferred from the fact that the proposed scheme was never undertaken and that for some years the whole question was deferred (meanwhile, in the United States audience ratings were deciding the fate of most programmes). "The demand for audience measurement was, of course, far less clamant in countries served by non-commercial broadcasting," (298) such as Britain it was further stressed. Soon, however, pressure began to grow inside and outside the B.B.C. in parallel with a more general dissatisfaction with the Corporation's policy. (299) In 1934 the Drama Department conducted its own survey and asked its listeners to write to the B.B.C. to give their opinions on the programmes. 12,726 letters reached the desks of the Corporation. It was the most extensive and most systematic use of correspondence from listeners which the B.B.C. could have conceived till then. Meanwhile, T.H. Pear, professor of psychology at the University of Manchester, described enthusiastically on the Radio Times the ways in which "American investigators tackle the problem of [the listener's] reactions to various radio programmes" and compared it with the primitive and unreliable system of the listeners' correspondence adopted by the B.B.C. In March 1935, Major Atkinson volunteered a memorandum on "Listener
Analysis" which set the proposal against a B.B.C.-like background. (300) "Recent experience in Germany," he stated, "has shown that a sufficiently exact knowledge of listeners' habits and tastes is essential to effective programme building even when the avowed object is to 'give the public what it needs and not what it wants'." He proceeded then to clarify his point citing another foreign experiment. In Poland, he wrote, a listener analysis had shown the appeal that the broadcasting organization was making to the various social groups. "Under this aspect, the whole listener public may be looked on as an ensemble of specific minorities, and service to minorities is part of our settled policy." So far, he then added, "the main reasons why we have ... turned away from the idea with dislike has undoubtedly been our feeling that the results of an inquiry would give a handle to critics who consider that we are 'giving the people what we think they ought to have' etc." But the time had come to face that fear. "I think all important broadcasting countries except ourselves have made, or are making such inquiries - which range from the elaborate listener-goodwill questionnaire of the American companies to the strictly official questions issued in Germany to listeners who have given up their licences." (301)

A few months later the Radio Manufacturers Association presented the B.B.C. with its umpteenth protest against the dullness of its radio programmes. (302) This time, the grievances were interpreted by the established broadcasting Corporation as a further sign of changing times. The Radio Manufacturers Association was presenting the B.B.C. with a pressing, undeniable reality. Their "Memorandum Re Programmes" contained proposals which were meant "to offset the general apathy as reflected in the decline of new wireless receiving licenses and, also, in sales of radio apparatus." The solution they offered for consideration was simple enough: broadcast more light entertainment, learn a few tricks from the Americans and the audience will grow steadily. (303) The B.B.C. had no other means to contrast the argument than investigating listeners'
tastes. Audience research, the Corporation officials eventually realized, could be used to the benefit of the B.B.C.: in such a difficult moment it could prove that a popular programme need not be "American;" (304) it could positively do away with all the criticisms about the unpopularity of the Corporation's policy. A thorough examination of public preferences could, if carefully conceived, demonstrate that the B.B.C. and a "British" kind of programmes were what the listeners would like most. The problem was then how to manipulate and adapt to the Corporation's own objectives such an "American" trick.

Given the growing dissatisfaction with the B.B.C. programmes, when Stephen Tallents arrived at the Corporation as Controller of Public Relations in September 1935 the change of attitude towards listener research was rather widespread. Eventually, a few months after Tallents' arrival, Reith himself gave in and declared that a certain degree of investigation into listeners' preferences could be desirable. Once the principle had been accepted Tallents endeavoured to study the matter in its various implications. (305) The basic idea was to set up "an ambitious attempt to catalogue, by up-to-date statistical methods, the tastes of radio listeners." (306) Meanwhile, a diffused interest in the habits of radio audiences was on the increase even outside the B.B.C. Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandie's very existence depended upon audience ratings. (307) Besides, advertisers in general were eager to know whether the introduction of commercial broadcasting in Britain could be a remunerative investment and needed reliable data on potential audiences.

Eventually, in May 1936 a professional statistician was approached by the B.B.C. to fill the new job of head of a listener research department. Robert J. Silvey was then working at the statistics department of the London Press Exchange. When the B.B.C. managers asked him to join the broadcasters' world, he happily consented. "Although I had never felt that, as a socialist, I was endangering my immortal soul by working in what is now called the private sector, I knew I should be more at home in a non-profit making enterprise," he
reckoned. (308) His immediate task was to develop reliable methods which could
give programme planners some indications on audience reactions to specific
programmes and to the B.B.C. overall output.

3.2 - "Counting Heads:" After 1936

On October 1, 1936, the B.B.C. Audience Research Department was officially
born. As a first move, Silvey analysed the material which the Corporation had
collected on listeners' reactions in the years preceding his appointment. It
consisted mainly of letters and of scattered impressions unsystematically
recorded by individuals and single departments. It basically told the story of a
mainly middle class audience which was growing unhappy with the B.B.C. output.
No clue was given which could help to ascertain the representativeness of the
sample. No agreement existed on the kind of methods which would have brought the
best results, once the traditional systems were abandoned. In fact, what lay at
the heart of the problem which Silvey was facing was that in 1936 "opinion polls, though common in U.S.A., had hardly reached" the United Kingdom. (309)
Particularly controversial had been till then the practice of sampling. To be
able to start his work Silvey would have had to introduce the world of public
bureaucracy into an almost unknown universe. His first task was the invention of
a system which would offer information on the exact quantity of listening hour
by hour. To this end, the "Listening Barometer" was gradually built up.
Introduced in its final form in 1939, it was fully used only after the war. It
was conceived so as to give reliable data on the number of listeners who were
tuned in any day at any time. Its results were based on the daily answers of
3,000 people - a sample which was chosen in such a way so as to be
representative of different ages, social classes and geographical distribution.

Yet the information given by the listeners' correspondence was not
altogether useless for the newly appointed staff of the Audience Research
Department. It was a (precarious) starting point to proceed with a qualitative
analysis of listening which Silvey considered at least as crucial as collection of data on the quantity of listening. (310) Equally important was to try to determine what kind of programmes were most popular among different sections of the audience and what were the audience’s reactions to individual programmes and lines of policy. The first years before the war were also devoted to experimenting with different techniques in what looked like a rather unusual field by American standards. Those experiments in fact “were mostly concerned with the extent to which the voluntary cooperation of listeners could be enlisted in listener research and the degree of reliability which could be attached to the results so obtained.” (311) This insistence upon volunteers would always remain a characteristic of listener research at the B.B.C. "No one will deny its disadvantages," Silvey admitted, "but it is well to be clear what the limits of these disadvantages are, for experience has shown that there is no practical alternative to the use of voluntary co-operation if certain jobs are to be done." (312) The problem which they were intent to solve was in fact how to preserve some kind of analysis in depth, or qualitative analysis, when at the same time trying to quantify audience preferences. (313) If a tentative idea had to be given on the quality of listener’s reactions, and Silvey and the B.B.C. were positive about it, the only path to follow was to render the use of voluntary co-operation as scientific as possible. The results of the polls were then preceded by a list of information about the quality of the sample, its limits, its specific characteristics. Yet, Silvey and his group were determined to go beyond that. Their eventual aim was to demonstrate that data based upon voluntary co-operation had universal value. Different data were extensively compared so as to verify assumptions and results. A final conclusion was quickly reached: "the representativeness of volunteers can be measured and, if the supply is great enough, a process of 'selective draft' can be applied to make the group whose offers of help are accepted comparable in structure to the universe it is required to represent." (314) The main difference between the
volunteers and the rest of the public, Silvey discovered, was not a question of quality but of degree: listeners who spontaneously took part in listener research work, it was established, were simply more interested in radio than the average listener. Their reactions differed from the average only insofar as they were "of a more intense character;" but the sign of those reactions was representative of a much wider audience.

Luckily it was not such an unheard of method in Britain, Silvey would explain. It had a very respectable all-British ancestry. "This is not, of course, a hypothesis without precedent. It is precisely the same as that employed by tea blenders when they rely upon professional tea-tasters to guide them in anticipating public taste. The tea-taster has a far more refined palate than the average tea-drinker, but here again the difference is one of degree only. The tea-taster is the average tea-drinker, raised to the nth power." (315) This sounds like stereotyped England transformed into a comforting thought for social scientists. Yet the comparison retains its strength and reveals some peculiar ingredients of that national image. Silvey used it for two reasons. Firstly it was effective: when one talked about tea, everybody in England was supposed to know what he was talking about. Secondly, in that peculiar blend of minority tastes and defence of the general public he truly identified himself, as his work at the B.B.C. shows, and was convinced that it exemplified the whole philosophy of the Corporation (and probably of the country.)

The same approach permeated the gradual development of suitable techniques of investigation into voluntary opinions. Before the war, the most widely used "qualitative" method used by the B.B.C. (never abandoned thereafter) was the "listening panel" technique. A number of listeners (chosen among those who had volunteered to give their opinions) were asked to return different questionnaires to the B.B.C. over a relatively long period of time (the first experiment, aimed at assessing reactions to the production of the B.B.C. drama department, involved 350 listeners for a period of three months). This
complicated procedure was adopted so as to collect information on "the way in which programs are received by those who choose to hear them," (316) - data which the B.B.C. had always thought of crucial importance. In fact, "if the whole concern of the B.B.C. were to attract the maximum number of listeners to every program," Silvey explained, "then listener research would have fulfilled its main task by providing a means by which the number of listeners could be assessed. But to regard 'large numbers' as the sole objective would be the most superficial form of democracy, which has been aptly defined as a state in which minorities get a square deal ... The Listening Panel method makes it possible to locate the source of a program's success or failure among the many factors which may contribute to this." (317) The problem was not only, nor chiefly, to 'count heads.' The task which fell upon the audience research staff was nothing less than to guarantee democracy, within broadcasting and in British society at large.

But apart from the impressionistic data collected by the B.B.C. before 1936 Silvey and his group could well have relied upon the experience acquired by the broadcasting organizations of foreign countries. Many had started perfecting listener research techniques much earlier than Britain, as Major Atkinson and Val Gielgud had pointed out. As many of his colleagues before and after him, Silvey knew that he could not ignore American practices, for instance. "By the mid-thirties several methods of measuring the size of radio audiences were in use in the United States," Silvey acknowledged. But he also had a clear perception of their peculiarities. "They had grown up in response to a need which did not exist in Great Britain," (318) he immediately added. Audience research in the United States was born under the auspices of the advertisers and of the advertising agencies who wanted to know the potential buyers a particular programme would help them to get in touch with. In contrast, "in the context of public service broadcasting, the need for audience measurement came mainly from
the programme planners' concern to assess the effect, in terms of consumption, of the pattern of broadcasting they had devised. The programme planner ... did not think of the population he served as a single monolithic mass, but as a number of different 'publics.'" (319) As the problem in Britain was not what were the best accounting techniques, then, it seemed clear since the very beginning that no practical lesson could come from the United States in the field of audience research, as the objectives of the two systems were too different.

Yet in January 1939 the situation had apparently changed and the panorama of research in the United States had differentiated enough to persuade the B.B.C. North American Representative that "in the United States interest in the possibilities of audience research had spread beyond commercial and professional broadcasting circles to the academic sociologists and psychologists." (320) Silvey was then persuaded to organize a trip to North America to study these new developments (and help with the organization of listener research in Canada). After two months he went back to London rather impressed. British and American attitudes towards opinion research were getting closer, he felt. Exchanges of information were possible and the reciprocal experiences could in some instances prove useful. "Listener research in the U.S.A. has become respectable," Silvey announced on the Listener as he got back. (321) "It is quite impossible to adequately describe the scope of listener research work in America without entering into it at great length. The volume of this kind of work is enormous and, on the whole, the quality is very high," he reported. But Britain had not much to learn. Insofar as they had similar problems and approaches to difficulties, they also had similar solutions. "Although far more listener research work has been done in America than here, the problems which face us both are very similar. After careful studies I have come to the conclusion that we need not feel that we lag far behind in finding solutions." (322)
Reciprocal consideration was however established and it would be resumed after the war. In fact, when the war broke out listener research in Britain was still very much in its experimental stage. It would develop swiftly under the pressure of military and political considerations when public attitudes became even more crucial. In July 1942 Tom Harrison, the famous social researcher, wrote on the radio column of the Observer: "Lately I have had the feeling ... that the B.B.C. has been assuming a more quantitative outlook. The growth and development of its Listener Research side ... may have something to do with it." Then he proclaimed triumphantly, "The B.B.C. is a pioneer of organised opinion study in this country." (323)

It was with a greater confidence in the British methods that Silvey went back to the States again after the end of the war. "Our methods of listener research were the subject of much interest," he reported, "and, I think, earned some respect." (324) Besides, the process of assimilation, owed to the American flexibility and diversification, had gone on. "So far as broadcasting is concerned, the major dynamic of research is, of course, the highly competitive situation in a field where, in the nature of things, criteria like circulation or box office receipts are absent. But it would be wrong to regard this as the sole motivation. There is also a disinterested interest exhibited most, of course, outside the radio industry, in knowledge about the significance and effect of broadcasting in society. I think it is to the credit of the American culture that these two interests, so different in their origin, should nevertheless be integrated as they are." (325) Different methods of analysis of listener reactions were employed by a wide range of different organizations. Networks and stations were directly involved in it, but also advertising agencies, research specialists, manufacturers and academic institutions pursued their investigations into more general aspect of public reactions. Among these, interesting developments could be detected and methods more akin to the B.B.C. own methods discovered. A certain amount of qualitative analysis was carried
out, Silvey explained, and at its best was "worthy of considerable respect." (326)
In fact, something could even be learnt from the Americans. When, after the end of the war, the listening panels were re-organized in Britain, an American invention was introduced to improve them. "The need which the Panels were set up to satisfy - for something equivalent to the response of the audience in the theatre which could be set alongside an equivalent of the box-office - was also felt in the temple of commercial broadcasting, the U.S.A. It was a device known after its progenitors as the Stanton-Lazarsfeld Programme Analyser. It involved bringing an audience into a studio to hear a recording of a broadcast. Each member of the audience was given a pair of push-buttons, a green (positive) and a red (negative). They were told to push the green button when they experienced pleasure and the red when they experienced pain." This technique, which was then refined and rendered more sophisticated, and more generally, any system which could record "audiences' reactions to programmes as they listened to them, was a valuable addition to audience research's toolbag." (327)
It could not replace the traditional panel method as it was much more rigid and expensive, but as a technique it was much superior to that.

Apart from particular methods, in the United States broader analyses of public attitudes towards radio were also being pursued. "The non-utilitarian type of social research into radio and television as means of communications, of which the U.S. is able to show a fair number of examples," Silvey reproached, "here awaits a patron. If the Corporation, or any other body, felt it to be its responsibility to father such research, the techniques are known here." (328)

Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, a well known sociologist, co-inventor of the Stanton-Lazarsfeld Programme Analyser, who endeavoured to study the application of mathematical models to the social sciences, was the main inspirer of those wide surveys ("radio researches", as they were called in the United States) (329) which were materially supported by the National Association of Broadcasters. So much closer to the B.B.C. approach were these studies that during the war Silvey
had been asked to contribute to the first volume of *Radio Research* an essay on "Radio Audience Research in Great Britain." There he summarized for the American reader the basic difference between the British and the American systems. "Radio Audience Research," he told the U.S. specialized public, "for the British Broadcasting Corporation is a healthy youngster of seven years ... Its aims and methods, and the conditions under which it has to work, naturally differ from those of Radio Research in the United States. The fact that British broadcast time is not sold to advertisers has two vital bearings on radio research ... It means that there are no sponsor's sales curves which can be examined for an indication of the effectiveness of programs. It also means that listener research is not involved in the process of selling time." In spite of cultural co-operation, this difference remained and projected its influence well after the war. After a twelve-day visit to New York in September 1947 Silvey recorded the intense vitality of listener research in the United States and the increasing demand for information which kept the system in motion. Yet, he had to add, "the social effects of subordinating American radio to commercial ends seems to me to be so retrogressive that it is hard to resist the feeling that any improvement in techniques which assist in the attainment of such ends is a matter for regret." Then even more explicitly, "under American conditions, every improvement in radio research is another nail in the coffin of worthwhile broadcasting." So, if immediate problems were very similar, the basic divergence in approach built into the very nature of the two audience research services seemed still insurmountable. "There is apparently no demand in the United States for any comprehensive qualitative listener research to supplement the quantitative 'ratings',' Silvey complained in 1949. "This is of course a direct consequence of the fact that for the commercial broadcasting system the predominant consideration is the delivery of the sales message to the largest number of potential buyers. From that standpoint, listeners' opinions of what they hear only matter insofar as they affect buying behaviour. (The thesis
that the B.B.C. was interested in knowing whether a minority, regardless of its size, was enjoying the programmes designed for it, was a completely new idea to most of those to whom it was explained)." (333) All in all, in 1949 as ten years before, there was not much to be learnt from the powerful American colleagues.

As far as quantitative research was concerned, Silvey was led to conclude, "nothing that I have learnt leads me to believe that there is any way of running it more cheaply, in either money or man-power, than we do now, or that we ought radically to re-cast our system." (334) The analysis of programme impact, a part from pre-testing, was no more inspiring from the B.B.C. point of view. It simply confirmed certain of its assumptions. "There is no measurement of programme impact in the U.S. on the scale that we have here. But this is the point to mention that I came across a number of evidences which support the theory of representativeness upon which we justify our panels." (335)

Thus the cultural assumptions of the B.B.C. Listener Research Department officials. But the problem extended well beyond the technical and theoretical boundaries of the statisticians. Once Silvey and his group had established who the listeners were, what they listened to, and what their reactions were to the different programmes, the question remained of utilizing these data. Information on audience reactions had to seep through the barrage of the policy planners before it could reach the desks of the programme producers. The B.B.C. had certainly changed during the war. The introduction of a Listener Research Department and its progressive strengthening is a clear-cut indication of the direction of the changes. "The emphasis on results was another indication of the extent to which the B.B.C. had changed. There was no longer any pretence that it was not its business to give listeners what they liked; 'counting of heads' had won the day." In fact, "the Light Programme had the specific task of obtaining 60% of listeners to the Home Service's 40% and to succeed in this was the first duty of those in charge." (336) Such were the general policy lines. When translated into practical procedures, however, the influence of those changes
becomes more uncertain and its significance as an indicator of change less than
clear.

In October 1949, a few months after Silvey had completed his report on
listener and viewer research in the United States, the Home Broadcasting
Committee discussed the policies to be adopted regarding the distribution of
listener research papers. The fear existed that if such figures were distributed
below the level of Heads of Departments, producers would tend to attach too much
importance to audience reactions and be inclined to prefer types of shows which
had already proved popular rather than risking experimenting with new ideas. The
charge was specifically made against Variety producers. In October the Board of
Management agreed "that in general it was undesirable to give actual audience
figures, and that if possible provision of listener research information should
be confined to some general comparative statement." (337) So strong was the fear
that the B.B.C. could give the listeners what they wanted. And so it remained
till very late. Somehow it had even increased after the war when it was dreaded
that competition between the Home and the Light Service might increase the
influence of audience ratings on the programmes. R. A. Randall, asked to draw a
report on programme criticism in July 1950 stated: "Departmental self-confidence
has been to some extent shaken by the influence of Listener Research, which was
comparatively negligible though obviously potentially important before the war
but has developed greatly with the idea of competition between Home and Light
Programmes. In spite of the attempt to maintain a unified basic programme
policy, competition has run true to form in revealing itself as a struggle for
listeners, and the mass of listeners have shown themselves to be without any
instinctive preference for the best or even the better." (338) The only
solution, Rendall thought, lay in a more pervasive diffusion "of the common
purpose from which the single all-embracing B.B.C. programme policy derives."
(339) It would therefore seem reasonable to conclude that starting from the late
1930s, a greater weight (and the comparative is significant) was being given to
sheer numbers listening to a programme. However, listening rates were always read (or were meant to be read) against an exquisitely qualitative background. The introduction of an audience research department put an end to guessed evaluations of a programme's impact. It did not, however, put an end to the determined will of the B.B.C. to preserve those productions and enterprises which might not appeal to mass audiences but which were meant to be experimental.

In 1952 some pressure was exercised within the B.B.C. to obtain more publicity for audience research results. "Members of the press were constantly irritated by the withholding of audience research material," (340) it was stated. Quite obviously, the reticence opposed by the B.B.C. in the face of public curiosity got more and more irritating as dissatisfaction with the Corporation monopoly was spreading. Yet the majority of the senior staff remained convinced that the traditional policy of caution and secrecy was still the best and the most respectful of the best qualities of British broadcasting. To their mind, "audience research figures were a scientific tool designed for a particular purpose ... and its use and dissemination should be restricted to those trained in its use." Furthermore, "they were one among many such instruments. Their publication would result in the setting up of pressures which would impair objective judgement and cut at the roots of responsible programme building. The majority view" the document solemnly concluded, "was therefore that increased publication of figures would be seriously harmful." So it was that in the early 1950s, the B.B.C. still believed that the British people were not able to judge and opine by themselves and that democracy could only be strengthened and protected from above. That those opinion leaders were changed is also true. The use they made of listener research figures was far more extensive and crucial than it used to be. "The B.B.C. no longer sought to lead and reform public taste; it now tried to match or anticipate it." (341) There was resistance to this process; (342) and it was not only a matter of regressive
forces which the unstoppable impetus of changing times would have overcome. The relationship with the audience, and audience research figures, maintained a peculiar B.B.C. mark.

3.3 - Paternalism and Chaos: An Attempt at a General Evaluation

The discussion on the introduction and methods of audience research at the B.B.C. evokes the main ambiguity which emerges from a comparison of the British and the American broadcasting systems. From our story two different visions of society and democracy would seem to emerge, both of which were seen as embodied in the two "contrasting" institutions. Once more, then, the Britishness of the B.B.C. would come to be identified with a paternalistic and rigidly monopolistic attitude towards broadcasting in general and listeners' preferences in the specific case: in Britain control and order in the supposed defence of minorities was apparently preferred over the free expression of criticism and the majority rule which was seen as the quintessence of the American system. In Silvey's words no less than in the B.B.C. internal correspondence, in parliamentary papers and governmental minutes an image of American radio comes forth which is definite and definitory. Audience research in Britain had to be compared to its American counterpart. Different methods had to be carefully confronted. Yet that study, those comparisons were bound to remain confined within very clear boundaries. The difference in attitude, the "contrasting" approach to broadcasting rendered any substantial exchange almost unthinkable. Between the late 1930s and the early 1950s both systems changed. But not to the point of transforming the nature of their inspirations.

Here again the same problem is posed which runs through the pages of the first two chapters. The difference Silvey and the others were talking about was a matter of fact. It materialized in systems differently organized and methods and procedures differently inspired. It was nurtured by specific circumstances which can be compared. But that a rhetoric on that contrast existed seems also
beyond doubt. Asa Briggs assumes and describes it in a lapidary style:  
"Eventually," he writes, "the British and the American broadcasting systems were to be so completely different ... that in all controversies about the place of radio in society they were to be taken as the two chief contrasting types." (343) In this quotation however the shift from contrasting realities ("were to be so completely different") to "contrasting types" is taken too much for granted as if it did not need an explanation. In that unremarked move from one system of reasoning to a different one a logical step is missing. What remains to be explained is why (or at least how) such a diversification had to lead to a system of legitimation intrinsically built upon national images. The question which Briggs does not help to pose concerns therefore, in the first instance, the necessity to define that system as a national institution, the expression of a peculiar Britishness which was so often asserted; a question which preludes to a further implication. A subtle ambiguity seems in fact to be built into the whole British approach to the question. While asserting the 'Britishness' of British broadcasting institutions, the claim is also being made that they can be elevated to the rank of a "type," a universal model which, giving expression to sublime "national peculiarities" could be applied everywhere, with American broadcasting playing the (definitory) role of the rival counter-attraction.  

That ambiguity has been at work all through the period here analysed. Its circumstances seem to urge an overall reconsideration of British images of American broadcasting which would operate a drastic distinction between the evolution of different systems and the reciprocal legitimation which was created in parallel. Seen from a British standpoint, this means that the new definition of the American cultural impact should take as its starting point a native British "cultural nationalism" whose most characteristic feature came to be its un-Americanness.  

Any tentative conclusion on the impact of the American system of broadcasting in Britain between the early 1920s and the early 1950s should
therefore imply a twofold reasoning. Firstly it should try to offer a new perspective on the peculiar system set up in 1922 and then substantially confirmed (transformed and adapted) thereafter. Its most enduring and inexorable characteristic was the tendency to a monopolistic control of at least the financial side of broadcasting. Writing in 1986, Anthony Smith has effectively described this peculiarity, which he sees projected well beyond the chronological scope of the present study: "At the end of many decades of slow building of broadcasting institutions, the British system has evolved a nexus of three interlocking monopolies, supervised by two quasi-governmental boards. The three monopolies are firstly the licence fee, payed by viewers wholly to the B.B.C. ...; secondly the monopoly of television advertising time on two channels granted by the I.B.A. [Independent Broadcasting Authority] to over a dozen commercial franchises; thirdly the monopoly of the special levy paid by those companies to Channel 4. Nowhere in our system does a group of entrepreneurs compete against another group of entrepreneurs for a single source of revenue. That is not an accident. It is the deliberate result of all the thinking and planning of the last 60 years." (344) It is also the more or less deliberate result of the pressures exercised by the business world. All through the period considered the crucial political decisions on the setting up of a broadcasting service in Britain were taken as the result of the summing up of political (in the wider sense and of the kind described by Anthony Smith) and economic circumstances. The business groups which were allowed to have a say in the discussion (and were powerful enough to ask for it) pushed in the direction of a controlled development, even when commercial television was introduced. The B.B.C. monopoly and public financing therefore were established as a result of both political (and bureaucratic) decisions and material (economic as well as physical: the limitation of wavelengths) conditioning factors. The system would then receive new strength from the degree of consensus it inspired. If at various points the audience showed signs of restlessness against certain elitist
excesses of the B.B.C., all in all public support was strong, and not only in political circles. When Silvey had to ask for the voluntary co-operation of listeners in the late 1930s (precisely when listening to continental radios was at its pre-war peak) he discovered "that there existed, among British listeners, an almost illimitable goodwill towards the B.B.C." (345) That convergence between the political and the business world, further sanctioned by the relatively stable positive response of the audience, was confirmed in the late 1930s and then again in the 1950s. In fact, the pressure for the introduction of commercial broadcasting not only came from an industry whose power was growing but limited, it was also invariably exercised within established standards. Furthermore, those who wanted to reform the system built around the B.B.C. monopoly were not less determined to counteract American economic, political and cultural influence and defend British national peculiarities than the supporters of the existing arrangement.

The British élites' conscious opposition to the American "model" of broadcasting materialized in, and lived on, a discourse on America which is in need of a critical examination. This leads to the second part of the reasoning. In this vision, American broadcasting is conceptualized as a synecdoche of American society, as the networks' executives were claiming, to which a British broadcasting system, viewed as the essence of British national traditions, is juxtaposed. Within this dichotomous vision the polarity public service (cultural priorities)/commercial system (economic priorities) has been progressively identified with the British and the American systems, respectively. What should be objected in this is not only that this image does not effectively describe divergencies and similarities (as an analytical definitions in scholarly works it is in fact being increasingly questioned), (346) but that it is falsely descriptive also because it sublimates specific historical developments into general categories and systems of values.
PART. TWO

THE DISCOVERY OF NATIONAL TRADITIONS OF INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT:
Chapter 4.
BEFORE THE WAR

"British programmes have to meet the natural tastes and preferences, traditions and habits of the British people. It is not to be expected that every item in the British programme should please foreign observers; or that the alleged lack of speed of these programmes should escape American criticism. But the test by which any national system of broadcasting must stand or fall is rather whether it caters for the needs of its own listeners and adequately exploits their distinctively national characteristics of mind and enjoyment in terms of the culture of the country." (347)

4.1 - The Pre-History of Transatlantic Broadcasting, 1923-1929

'Hullo America!', the first direct broadcast from America to the United Kingdom was transmitted on short waves on November 26, 1923. (348) Its actual content did not matter much. British broadcasting was then less than one-year old and even the most common and comparatively cheaper medium and long wave radio sets were to be found only in a minority of households. It goes without saying that the sophisticated crystal sets which could pick up short-wave trans-Atlantic transmissions were a rarity and a real curiosity. Yet in the public mind the exchange of broadcast messages at such a long distance remained something of a historic event. What struck everybody's imagination was that a sound originated in the United States might be 'listened in' in Britain in the very moment it was being uttered.

In the course of the following month, programmes radiated from various American stations in New York (State and City), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis were also heard in Britain. The B.B.C. enthusiastically publicized them all. It was just the beginning, the newly born broadcasting company promised. Programme exchanges, it claimed, would be developed beyond the most ambitious
dreams: sitting in your own living room, it told its audience, you will soon be able to listen to sounds, voices and music originated in the United States. While a small group of loyal short-wave listeners was establishing itself as an identified lucky minority, the public at large reacted rapturously. A strong faith in technical progress made everybody believe that one day such wonders would be rendered available to everybody. "Technically there is much achievement promised," the Radio Times announced its readers immediately after the experiment. "The re-radiation of American concerts to English listeners is a development which will bring an interesting novelty into the range of the most model crystal set." (349) Soon a few names of distant stations acquired celebrity: Pittsburgh (KDKA) and Schenectady (WGY) were the "names of fame, ... and many a British listener tuned them in after the B.B.C. had closed down for the night." (350)

After the initial, almost uncritical enthusiasm, however, technical difficulties increasingly came to the foreground. In the course of 1924 the belief in the potentialities of long distance short-wave transmissions gradually faded away. Bad reception, entirely dependent on weather conditions, proved much less easy to overcome than had been expected. While domestic programmes were improving at a fast pace trans-Atlantic transmissions remained for much longer at an experimental stage. Actual developments fell short of the great expectations of the early days. No system seemed to be available which could guarantee that programmes would be received without serious disturbances.

So, while direct transmission remained a powerful myth of trans-Atlantic communication, alternative methods were devised which would prove more durable and less hazardous. Recorded programmes did not seem at that time a suitable replacement. (351) Most of the magic of broadcasting resided in live programmes: the very idea of being able to listen to a certain event which was taking place in that very moment in a distant place had constituted its main appeal. Furthermore, recording techniques were not sufficiently developed to
guarantee suitable results. The most obvious alternative was then to substitute
the individual radio sets with a more powerful receiver which would tune in
American programmes and then re-transmit them on long waves for British
listeners. In May 1925 the Radio Times announced that the Radio Corporation of
America was adopting this practice on a much larger scale than the B.B.C.
seemed able to do. The American Corporation was indeed trying to build up a
long chain of stations which would enable it to extend the practice of re-
broadcasting of British programmes. The reciprocal, however, seemed more
complicated than British listeners would have thought. By then, the B.B.C. had
become aware of the hideous difficulties of international broadcasting. The
Corporation was now more aware of its powers and more demanding in its
standards. Furthermore, when it came to invest money (and the setting up of a
powerful receiver represented a large investment) it became even more cautious.
It was not any more a question of broadcasting whatever came on the air from
the other side of the ocean.

At this point of the story, the B.B.C. wanted to select "suitable American
programmes" rather than to accept what the Americans and conditions would allow
for. And this immediately complicated the issue. "Our latest programmes are
picked up in America in the early part of their evening; but it is after
midnight here when the best American programmes normally arrive. Moreover the
short-waves on which the American stations work suffer a great deal from night
distortion ... The B.B.C. are pursuing their experiments, and although they are
gaining ground steadily, they would not be justified at this stage in
recommending the expenditure of a large sum on the erection of special
receiving apparatus for American programmes." (352) Indeed, since December 1925
trans-Atlantic broadcasting from West to East was virtually interrupted. (353)
In April 1926 the B.B.C. announced to its listeners that "at the present time
it is impossible either to state that a relay of music from America will be
carried out at any definite time or to be sure that if carried out it will be
one of good quality." (354) Then, between 1927 and 1929 direct transmission from America did not increase in number or importance as no new solution was being found to the problem of the quality of the relay.

Meanwhile, "American stuff" was getting to British ears through other channels. Attention towards what was being done in U.S. radio was kept very much alive. As the B.B.C. progressively extended its programme hours the very necessity to find new ideas led the Corporation to imitate or duplicate programmes and employ American artists. Towards the end of 1926, while the broadcasting of "live" programmes from the United States was becoming increasingly difficult, the B.B.C. decided to transmit an "imitation American transmission." The audience response "if correspondence be any criterion," as the B.B.C. magazine wrote, was enthusiastic to the point that "it has been decided to give another programme of this kind in the near future." (355) One night in November, between 10.15 and 11, a second American programme was broadcast on the National programme. It had been emphatically announced in the pages of the Radio Times: "Not only will it include dance music and a good percentage of what is perhaps the most interesting part to British listeners of all American programmes - the inimitable style of their announcers - but it will contain some actual reproduction of the voices of one or two of the best known broadcast artists in the United States." (356) It was another success. Imitation, or parody, of American shows would thereafter remain an established genre in the history of British broadcasting, very popular both with the audience and the professional broadcasters. Similarly durable, and much more impressive from a quantitative point of view, would be the collaboration with American artists, from famous humourists, such as Nick Lucas, (357) to musicians and movie stars, and the inclusion of American material (music, in the first place, then entire programmes, and formats) in the broadcast output.

Gradually, between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, then, the picture of the contacts, either fake or real, with U.S. radio began to change in
quality and to grow in size. Smoother relations with the American networks were soon translated into more numerous programme exchanges and cumulated efforts to improve the quality of transatlantic transmissions (or relays, as they came to be called.) In August 1931 William S. Paley, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System (C.B.S.), coming back from a trip to Europe sent out a sensational press release. "Europe will exchange radio programs with U.S.," he announced. "Although international broadcasts have been at least a weekly feature of our programs since the beginning of 1930," he said, "... they have retained the character of novelty broadcasts in the minds of most people. Also, a great majority of them have been transmissions from East to West, with the United States sending very few programs to European listeners. That will no longer be the case." (358) A new phase was in fact being opened in international broadcasting where cultural boundaries would play a new role and acquire new characteristics. The rhetoric of broadcasting as "the most powerful instrument for world peace ever placed in the hands of mankind" (359) was born. At one level, it seemed that a truly international culture could be developed and that ideas could reach beyond the most inaccessible boundaries. At another level, however, new protecting walls were also being erected.

4.2 - Discovering America: The Parody and the Real Thing, the 1930s

As it did more or less regularly, on July 18, 1930 the Radio Times informed its readers of the latest American radio craze. (360) "They have conquered America," announced a high-faluting caption. The conquerors were Andrew Halt Brown, "the naive and dim-witted president of the Fresh Air Taxi Cab Company of America Inc." and Amos Jones, "his level headed partner and the cab driver," (361) the main characters of the comedy serial appropriately titled "Amos 'n' Andy" and sponsored by Pepsodent. "Created in black voice by a pair of white vaudevillians," (362) "Amos 'n' Andy" was the first true serial which acquired national popularity in the United States. It was built around
the dialogues between the two "negroes." Nothing ever happened. Its appeal derived mainly from the repetitiveness of the situations and the familiarity with the two characters. The N.B.C. began transmitting it in 1929. The following year the couple was already so popular that the B.B.C. reckoned it could attempt to broadcast it to its listeners. (363) "That nightly 15 minutes is almost indescribable to an English reader," the Radio Times warned, "hardly to be understood by an English listener. There is so little in it that one can describe. It is not a joker's act, nor a mere jumble of wisecrack jokes. The listener laughs, he laughs with a fellow feeling, not as at a smart saying ... Nightly at the same hour comes this new engagement of infusing one's life with this extra friendly element; this is the spiritual cup of tea [sic!] of a tired and thirsty nation." The article concluded wondering whether "a parallel pair of characters" could become so popular in England; "it is interesting to dream," it added, "what kind of characters they would have to be." (365)

Less than five months afterwards, as the owners' of the programme agreed to avoid any mention of sponsorship, the B.B.C. decided it could be worth giving its audience the opportunity to dream it themselves. On New Year's Eve 1930 British listeners could hear an Amos 'n' Andy programme, specially relayed from the United States. "We announce this in advance," the Radio Times said at the beginning of December, "because a broadcast by Amos 'n Andy is something of an event. These pretended negroes, who broadcast daily in the interest of a powerful toothpaste corporation, are the single most popular item in the American programmes." Interestingly, the B.B.C. did not ask its listeners to share American enthusiastic reactions; on the contrary it invited them to a detached evaluation of that distant culture. "To hear Amos 'n' Andy ... will be to take a step nearer to solving the great riddle of those U.S." (366) Many would have agreed with this interpretation which saw "Amos 'n' Andy" as the quintessence of the cultural life of the nation. George Bernard Shaw had said
no less when he exclaimed: "There are three things which I shall never forget about America - the Rocky Mountains, the Statue of Liberty and Amos 'n' Andy." (367) An anonymous British listener went even further. "How often does one guffaw at Don Quixote, Mr. Pickwick, My Uncle Toby, or Falstaff?" he warned his fellow listeners. "To my mind Amos 'n' Andy are as great as these. Their secret is that, while always their intensely individual selves, they are not merely hard-up American niggers, but characters more akin to the listener than he sometimes cares to admit." (368)

As was usual in the United States, the programme opened with a synopsis which in this case also helped to introduce the couple to British listeners. "Amos and Andy, two colored men," the script recites, "who were born and raised on a plantation in the southern part of the United States decided to move to New York City. Since arriving in New York they were persuaded to join a colored lodge known as the Mystic Knights of the Sea. This colored fraternity holds a meeting once a month in a small hall in the colored section of New York City. The high officer of the Mystic Knights of the Sea is known as the Kingfish. Tonight they are having a regular monthly meeting and Amos, who is much younger than Andy, and dominated by Andy is scheduled to make a speech before the members of the lodge. Being his first attempt at making speeches, he purchased a book entitled 'How to Speak in Public' and has spent several days trying to prepare himself for his address. As the scene opens now we find Amos and Andy seated on the speaker's platform at the lodge hall. Directly in front of the two colored boys is the Kingfish's chair. The hall is rapidly filling and now we find Amos and Andy talking in their natural colored accent before the meeting is called to order. Here they are." (369)

At this point, the microphone was swiftly passed over to the comedians. Then, for about ten minutes, the two talked to each other "in their natural colored accent." The first to be heard was Andy trying to cheer up a dispirited Amos: "All you gotta do is remembrin' how you goin' staht out. All you goin' say
at fust is 'Unaccustomed as I is to makin' speeches.' "Is dat de custard like in custard pies?" came Amos' disarming reply. (370) An absurd dialogue followed which culminated in Amos' final speech, a series of nonsense. "How was dat?" asked Amos as he sat down after his performance. "Dat was great," was the answer. "Dat'll take de brothers ten yeahs 'bout ten yeahs to figgeh out whut you was talking 'bout." (371)

Reactions within the B.B.C. were very cautious. While from the technical point of view the programme was judged excellent, at the end of the fifteen minutes everybody was wondering whether the English listeners would also need ten years to figure out what had been going on. Indeed, "a single episode from the repertoire of this famous couple is rather bewildering to an English audience," as a B.B.C. official wrote to the Vice-President of the N.B.C. (372) "If the States can stand for that material," a listener exclaimed, "they deserve all they get in the way of gangsters, gunmen and graft." (373)

Yet the formula was impressive, for the B.B.C. no less than for its listeners. "We have no such broadcast item over here," the Radio Times had warned, "though it might certainly be possible to create a Cockney or Lancashire Amos 'n' Andy." (374) The British Corporation eventually came out with other couples of "'negro' cross-talkers," such as Alexander and Mose - "many listeners ... have compared them to the American stars 'Amos 'n' Andy' ... greatly to the disadvantage of the latter pair" - (375) or the "Koloured Komedy Kings," (376) imitations or adaptations of the much tougher to understand original American programme.

But the relay business was only at its beginning. The "Amos 'n' Andy" broadcast had taught the B.B.C. that there was much to learn, that cultural exchanges did not simply require suitable channels. A whole translating apparatus would have to be built up if the B.B.C. wanted to set up what it considered a "respectable" communication between foreign peoples, if the
natural inclinations and the established habits of its national audience had to be preserved. Since its very early programmes, the Corporation had always been extremely sensitive towards the necessity to respect, promote and refine the national culture. In the encounter with America this task materialized in different, ambiguous, sometimes even contradictory policies. The channels of information, communication, and exchange of ideas with America had to be kept open as the B.B.C. needed to co-operate with the U.S. radio industry; yet American influence was also to be retained under rigid control.

This attitude informed the B.B.C. policy of exchanges with the American networks which entered in its most active phase in the early 1930s. In 1931 the agreement announced by Paley became effective. (377) It materialized the following year in a series of programme exchanges, which alternated "two kinds of programmes, the informative and the characteristic." The former consisted of talks meant to describe the main characteristic of the two countries; the latter comprised four programmes "of a more general nature, intended to be typical of the country from which they emanate." (378) The first "characteristic" programme broadcast to English listeners was "Stars of American Radio," a C.B.S. show where various stars of transatlantic radio were presented to the foreign audience. According to the Radio Times, listeners were once more divided: those who thought it perfect and those who found it unacceptable. The B.B.C. magazine declared that it took the first view. "The programme - its precision of presentation, confidential familiarity of its announcement, the hymn tune repeated half a dozen times by way of trade-mark, the almost undiluted sentimentality of its content - presented a flawless picture of the lighter side of American broadcasting. We ourselves felt slightly faint before the hour was over, but could not deny the perfection of the thing within its own limits; it was so American." (379)

Foreign relays were soon acknowledged a role of importance within B.B.C. programming. In June 1932 Colonel Carpendale, Controller of Programmes, sent
out a memorandum on "Policy and Procedure as to Foreign and Overseas Relays" which took as its starting point the fact that "D.G.'s [Director General] policy, generally stated, is to develop the practice of relaying programmes (both informational and artistic) from and to Europe and America to a considerably greater extent than heretofore." As far as American programmes were concerned, apart from popular and dance music, vaudeville, drama and characteristic sketches, public events and "sightseeing by means of the wandering microphone" (380) were judged worth considering, provided that differences in approach would always be kept in mind.

While relaying techniques and policies were revised and improved (American relays were to increase dramatically only in 1935-37) and communication between the two countries was getting each day more intense, differences and distances which divided British and American radio were staged in a series of parodies of U.S. broadcasting produced and transmitted by the B.B.C. in the early 1930s. The genre was not new but the entertainment value had greatly increased since the early 1920s. To begin with, the producer of the new programmes, Eddie Pola, had a deeper, more realistic knowledge of American entertainment. Besides more frequent contacts with U.S. radio had created, and were still creating, a familiarity with transatlantic programmes among British listeners which rendered Pola's task much easier and more sophisticated.

"Having seen and taken part in many a sponsored programmes," Pola wrote explaining how he conceived the programmes, "I had a little idea of what to do. I approached John Watt [then B.B.C. Director of Entertainment] and told him my scheme ... Then I sat down and thought of what I could do to entertain the British public for an hour. You see I was doing AMERICAN entertainment and therefore I had to be careful. So I selected the best known radio stars of America and picked out the people best suited to mimic them ... It was American
entertainment; but the sort of thing the British public had seen on the screen (381) and therefore it was easier to make fun of it." (382)

The programmes, conducted by Pola himself, were all based on a rather simple formula: the producer selected famous (in Britain) actors and sketches from U.S. radio and then asked British artists to stage them in a parodied version. "'Hot' bands and 'torch' singers," the Radio Times cheerfully announced, introducing the first of the unprogrammed series, "chatty talks on the most embarrassing details of health, travelogues, serial dramas that run for months, gossip columns of the air, propaganda speeches by every sect and faction - you can hear them all, timed to a split second ... America Calling [as the programmes were called] ... will give an impression of what an all-star American programme sounds like." (383) Among the stars introduced in the five-programme series were Kate Smith "the lady singer who sits on pianos and breaks them," (384) Amos and Andy, Cab Calloway's band, Al Jolson, "the man who made the early talkies go so sentimental," (385) Sophie Tucker and the highspot comedy team Burns and Allen.

But the "America calling" programmes were not only a parody. They also seriously imitated the American practice of the fast succession of different items and introduced it to the British audience. "Some people thought that the programmes were too fast," wrote Pola. "Now, my main thought when broadcasting my type of popular entertainment is speed. The worst thing in the world for a listener is that awful silence when nothing is happening on the air." (386) He had learnt this from American producers and was not prepared to make fun of it.

Whether it was because they were Americanized or because they were British enough to make everything American appear ridiculous, Pola's programmes enjoyed a considerable success and probably succeeded both in increasing the feeling of a cultural diversity and at the same time in reducing it, or at least, rendering American radio more familiar. (387) Then "America Calling" disappeared.
for a couple of years as American relays were building up its source material
(American stars known to the British audience). (388)

Meanwhile, the American relay business was booming. When the fifth
"America Calling" programme was broadcast on March 30 and 31, 1936 the Radio
Times announced: "As usual" the "ebullient" Eddie Pola "will explore the more
fantastic possibilities of radio in the land of coast-to-coast hook-ups, six-
tube sets, and amateur hours." But then it warned: "After a regular course of
American broadcasting in 'Five hours back' we are prepared to listen really
critically to Pola this time." (389)

4.3 - Communicating between Time Zones: "Five Hours Back"

Thirteen months before the 1936 "America Calling" programme the opening
transmission of "Five Hours Back", the first regular series of rebroadcast
American programmes, had gone on the air. Starting on February 16, 1935 at 4.45
- 5.00 p.m. on Saturday afternoons the B.B.C. re-transmitted a half-hour relay
of the N.B.C. programme as broadcast in the United States around 12 noon.

The B.B.C. had proposed the arrangement to the National Broadcasting
Company in December 1934 following an American offer to relay their programmes.
To the British Corporation, it was an inexpensive means of filling the air
which was worth considering. Insofar as it could be kept under a close
supervision from Britain, its introduction was therefore judged advisable.
Preparations did not last long. In a month an agreement was arrived at which
suited both the British and the Americans.

"Five Hours Back" was kept on the air for a whole year. It was broadcast
weekly in four series between February 1935 and March 1936 (with
interruptions). (390) Light music, crooning, choir and comedy sketches in
varying proportions formed the bulk of the programme. It was in fact explicitly
requested by the B.B.C. that the series would remain on the very light side of
broadcasting: "Experience showed," it was at one point stated, "that the
lighter types of entertainment come over best." (391) The problem was that "Five Hours Back" was picked up from American short-wave stations and re-broadcast. As the quality of the reception could not be guaranteed it was decided that music would represent a lesser risk than words. Occasionally, however, in its morning programmes the N.B.C. broadcast talks of particular interest (such as sports commentaries).

It was, this time, the 'real thing' - as it was repeatedly stressed. "The great feature of this series ... is that British listeners will not be hearing something specially devised to suit English tastes: they will be hearing how the N.B.C. of America entertains Americans;" (392) then "unless the N.B.C. yield to the temptation of 'hotting up' their programme for the larger public ... we may expect to hear a typical, average American broadcast which should be instructive as well as entertaining." (393) In fact, the N.B.C. did not resist the temptation of diffusing abroad a better than average image of itself. (394)

The B.B.C. was fully aware of it and appreciated its result. "The program is, as we all know, a special one," the B.B.C. North American Representative wrote in December 1935. The N.B.C. manager who was in charge of the series, he added, "said their normal morning programs were so bad that they could not consider sending them over to England." (395) In the B.B.C. mind this was not a bit contradictory. Complaining about the quality of a particular programme, the Director of Programme Planning put it rather bluntly to the member of his staff who was dealing with the American network: "I believe the original understanding with N.B.C. provided for their giving us really distinctive material. Can you do anything about this so that the rest of the series represent to English listeners something typically American and, if possible, of a kind and of a standard at least equal to our best, and preferably displaying a certain virtuosity?" (396) The programme, therefore, did not need to be really typically American insofar as it fulfilled the Corporation's expectations on what was typically American. British listeners were never made
aware of this subtle difference. Not a word of those backstage negotiations seems to have leaked through the walls of Broadcasting House. On the contrary, the Radio Times cheerfully proclaimed “Five Hours Back” the first genuinely American series to be heard in Britain.

Whether it was American entertainment for foreign consumption or real U.S. stuff, it was a success. After the first month of transmissions, C. G. Graves congratulated the N.B.C. “I think the experiment has been well worth making, and the reaction that we have received from listeners, though as mixed and contradictory as usual, has shown on the part of the unprejudiced a real appreciation of the quality of the programmes and imaginative realisation of the technical accomplishment ... Is it asking the N.B.C. too much to continue these broadcasts until the end of May?” (397) The request was repeated in December. This did not mean that the B.B.C. was prepared to accept the format as a permanent item of its output. “It is possible that we may all find it desirable to drop the series idea and concentrate rather on isolated broadcasts that would give listeners a more varied view of American life and thought ... though in a way marking time we are anxious not to let the U.S. slip right out of the listening picture ... And so while other ideas are simmering, we should like to continue as at present, that is to say we are asking Raymond Swing to give another series of news talk for us and we should like to ask N.B.C. to give us another series of ‘Five Hours Back.’” (398)

The attempt pursued by the B.B.C. to make America known to its public included a less frivolous effort exemplified by the traditional talks on topical items. If the United States constituted a recurring subject in the informative programmes of the B.B.C. at least since the late 1920s, it was only in 1933-34 that the Corporation showed a consistent interest in providing its listeners with a regular correspondence on what was going on on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Raymond Gram Swing was the first radio commentator who
broadcast steadily his talks on American politics and history for British listeners. American by birth, between 1924 and 1934 he had worked in London as foreign correspondent of the Philadelphia newspaper Public Ledger. Meanwhile he was helping out with the programmes on American history produced by the B.B.C. for its school broadcasts. Gradually he found he was being trained as a professional broadcaster and adapted to B.B.C. standards. So when in 1934 William Paley, C.B.S. President, proposed to the British Corporation an exchange programme which would have included weekly news, Reith agreed on condition that Swing would be the American commentator for the B.B.C. Urged by political pressures (the need for a more diffuse information on America in Europe) Paley agreed. So it was that beginning on February 27, 1935 for a whole, politically crucial decade Swing's soft accent became, to British minds and ears, the very sound of American politics. (399) His subjects varied from the day's events to broader social and political themes. Of his B.B.C. training he retained a certain British tone laid over a clear American accent, a slow mannered talk meant to suggest distinguished authority, and an impeccable effort at giving "objective" information. (400)

However, Swing did not monopolize the "serious" side of the B.B.C. projection of the U.S. to its listeners. Apart from occasional talks and conversations which were ever more frequent, on the less popular side there were also the so called "Transatlantic Debates." The series, whose first programme (a Cambridge-Yale confrontation) was broadcast in February 1933, consisted in a number of more or less boring conversations between British and American undergraduates usually drifting on about the differences between the two countries. Often disturbed by poor communicating conditions, they soon wore off as a novelty and by June 1935 the B.B.C. decided, against American pressures, that they had exhausted their interest. (401) The time was ripe for more sophisticated attempts at transatlantic communication. If the traditional
talk à la Swing, however excellent, might not seem enough, there were more suitable integrations.

A couple of months after Swing's first American talk a second crucial character was introduced in the business of interpreting America to the British audience, Alistair Cooke. Destined to become a star of Anglo-American radio, Cooke is now described as "a man who has brought British journalism to American culture." (402) He knew his America well; he had studied and worked in the United States for several years and loved it. As an expert on American life and things American Cooke was first employed by the B.B.C. as film critic. He therefore entered broadcasting through one of the most sensitive areas of Anglo-American cultural relations. This experience provided him with a knowledge on the state of affairs within the Corporation and in the listeners' minds which he must have found later extremely useful. The business of commenting on U.S. films was indeed a delicate endeavour: national sensitiveness and declarations of openness had to be perfectly balanced. And Cooke was keenly aware of those difficulties. The first problem he saw, and presented the B.B.C. with, concerned the use of Americanisms. "I am not interested in transporting slang," he assured his employers. "But as we have been shamelessly borrowing American words for a hundred years, and confessing the theft about fifty years later, I see no harm in helping the process to be speedier and more accurate." Furthermore, he stressed, "on a special subject, whose only technical jargon is American, we may have to work out a rule of thumb." (403) Here was a delicate subject matter the B.B.C. had always tried to regulate. Apart from individual idiosyncrasies and preferences, the Corporation had established its Advisory Committee on Spoken English as early as 1926. The British broadcasters' sensitivity on their "received English," as theorized by Daniel Jones, or on the less academic King's English (404) had been sharpened by the increased contacts with the American version of their language. The B.B.C. desire to invent, and diffuse, a common English language had as a
corollary a defensive policy against the introduction of Americanisms (even if
there were those who theorized the advent of a transatlantic idiom). (405) So
if officially the B.B.C. declared itself in favour of reciprocal contamination
(406) the Corporation's very preoccupation with language rendered the handling
of American or Americanized items more awkward, less spontaneous. Yet this was
simply the most superficial part of Cooke's explorations in the borderland of
Britishness. The old question of the defence of British films against their
American competitors remained at the very centre of his attention. (407) In
March 1936 for instance some listeners wrote to the Radio Times complaining
about the pro-Americanism of his comments and explicitly accused him of being
"unpatriotic." (408) As in the language question, however, the B.B.C.
management approved his conduct and discarded the accusations as irrelevant.
Indeed, his American education was considered a precious asset. "The last thing
that we should want our film critic to do," his direct superior wrote, in
appreciation of his comments "would be to praise British films because they are
British, without reference to their merits." (409) Indeed, it was by observing
his performances as film critic that the B.B.C. realized how good a translator
between the two cultures and languages he could be - by the Corporation's
standards.

Apart from his merits as a professional broadcaster, Cooke seemed in fact
particularly fit to occupy the undefined boundaries which united and separated
British and American radio. He was probably one of the few people who could
have given such an entertaining image of the difference which irresistibly
divides foreign cultures as the one he depicted talking about the American fate
of a film directed by Hitchcock. "In Manhattan," he started out, "the new
Hitchcock movie, 'The Lady Vanishes', has been voted by the critics as the best
directed movie of 1938 ... There is just one moment, however, in that film,
where a great laugh rises from the American audience, which positively does not
happen in England. When the train is switched which the Central European crook
is chasing along the road by the side of the track, a great shout goes up from
the startled audience. The two cars come along the road, and half the audience
is smitten with astonishment, and cries 'Ho, Buicks!' You know that Americans
will often accept ridiculous plots provided the material details are precise.
They had been thinking - the poor fools - for an hour that 'The Lady Vanishes'
was taking place in our own day, until the sudden vision of those two ancient
Buicks." (410) Here was the man who could see America through British and
American eyes and keep equally removed from either vision. The series he was
charged with in 1935 could not have coincided more fully with his attitudes.

Cooke's "American Half Hour," as his 1935 programme was called, was "a
weekly review of American news, ideas, music, history, and entertainment." The
various items, chosen, produced and presented by Cooke composed "a series of
Saturday evening broadcast symposia designed ... to show how America lives."
(411) Entirely produced in London, with special records made in America on
request, it was meant "to give," as Cooke himself wrote, "the authentic
pleasure and surprise of knowing a country three thousand miles away which most
Europeans of all classes know very much less than they suppose. That is why it
is America and not, say, France, that is being drawn on. We know something of
France, of Germany, of Italy, perhaps less of Spain. But of America we know
only what the newspapers say - and what Hollywood invents." The programmes
proved reasonably successful; the audience's reactions seemed to follow what
was then the most common destiny of these informative American programmes. They
were not heard by millions but those who tuned in liked them. (412)

Throughout his experience as a professional broadcaster, interpreting and
describing America to the British, Cooke proceeded on the basis of the original
conception he worked upon for his "American Half Hour." According to his
experiences, he maintained, "in very many ways of thinking and feeling and
living the Englishman and the Pole or the German are more like each other than
the Englishman and the American." (413) Information did flow through and
arrived at the most diverse sectors of British society but it was constantly in need of a subtle, between-the-lines interpretation. "Ardent students of Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Hergesheimer, Milt Gross, Charles McEvoy, and the American films," were numerous and scattered all over Britain. However, as the Radio Times admitted, "we find ourselves constantly in need of more information about American life; so far we have merely got more and more confused. And the short-wave relays seem to be confusing us still more." (414) In the exhausting effort to eliminate the confusion without stereotyping, during his first two months as B.B.C. expert of American life, he told the British radio audience innumerable stories on cow-boys and black artists, described the quintessence of American literature, explored the Pacific Coast, interpreted American humour.

4.4 - The North American Representative, 1936

Cooke's overwhelming endeavours might not have been carried through without the crucial assistance of the newly appointed B.B.C. North American Representative, the institutional channel that the Corporation established in 1936 to cope with its almost frenzied American activities. While the need for some kind of steady contact with the United States was apparent since the early 1930s, the special relationship materialized in an established institution only much later. Within the B.B.C., resistences against the official acknowledgement of a special relationship were still strong. There had been contacts to plan programme exchanges (as Paley had emphatically announced in 1931); but the American proposals of establishing a constant flow of programmes met with the suspicious refusal of the British Corporation. No matter how willing it was to distribute its material in the United States (as in the other English Speaking countries),(415) the B.B.C. was not ready to accept the reciprocal as a norm. At the beginning of 1934, then, the British broadcasters told their American colleague that they were still very much against any agreement of regular
exchanges. "The inclusion of continental and American material in our programmes in this country," the B.B.C. Director of Empire and Foreign Services opposed to the American proposal, "is based primarily in selecting interesting items ... or asking for special performances, notably talks, when occasions arise abroad which make such special talks desirable. We have consistently set our faces against the regular inclusion of foreign broadcasts so many times per week or per month in our programmes, and nothing will make us alter this decision." (416)

Almost nothing, since exactly one year later the decision was not only altered but wholly reversed. By then, "Five Hours Back" and Raymond Swing went regularly on the air and not only would the B.B.C. have found it very hard to decide to eliminate those programmes but the quantity of American material was increasing enormously. Besides, the relationship with America had become much more complicated than could have been foreseen in 1933. Now, the crucial problem concerned the selection of suitable items to be imported from the United States, the B.B.C. programmes having conquered their steady tiny share of the enormous American broadcasting "market."

What had remained the same was the British Corporation's conviction that, no matter whether American material would increase daily, the overall output balances had to be kept under strict control. Furthermore, there was a British way of doing things which could not be abandoned. To the Corporation's horrified surprise, the two main broadcasting companies in America did not "have the same pull over the people who really count in the U.S. that the B.B.C. has in Great Britain." (417) Having their own man in New York seemed therefore an inexorable necessity. Almost at the same time when regular relaying of American programmes started the B.B.C. management decided they needed a permanent agent on U.S. ground. On January 10, 1935, J. C. W. Reith wrote to Angus Fletcher, of the British Library of Information in New York, explaining his plans. The B.B.C., he said, was going to appoint a specially designed North American
Representative. Based in New York, he would "represent our interests in various ways ... I think you will see the kind of things that we want him to do. If, for instance, we were having another series of talks from America, it would be his responsibility to advise us as to the speakers, and then, on our behalf, to make the necessary arrangements with them ... Also he would have to keep his eyes open for interesting items for us to relay from the American programmes."

Reith's plan was two-sided. On one hand it represented an official acknowledgement of the importance of the United States and confirmed the interest of the Corporation in reciprocal exchanges; on the other it arrogated to the B.B.C. the power to decide what would be broadcast to Britain and how.

If Felix Greene, the first North American Representative, found himself deeply involved in the promotion of the B.B.C. (and British) image in America, and in the distribution of B.B.C. recordings, his first and primary task in the Corporation's eyes was another one. His very presence in the United States had been justified precisely as a symptom of openness towards American programmes. In December 1935, giving a speech at the Radio Institute of the Audible Arts of New York the newly appointed N.A.R. had rhetorically announced: "You may be wondering why I am here, what the motives were that persuaded the British Broadcasting Corporation to have someone on this side of the Atlantic permanently to represent them in the United States and Canada ... I am here so that through broadcasting my fellow countrymen can get a greater knowledge of this North American continent ... I want the people of my country to hear your fine music, to get into touch with the minds of your great thinkers." He would repeatedly, if less rhetorically, insist upon the prominent role of the West to East transfers. Indeed, at one point he would complain that Broadcasting House was not following this plan enthusiastically enough. "Apart from the special work in times of crisis or important national occasions," he was writing a few months after the Abdication crisis of 1936 and the ensuing Coronation - "the chief function of this American office should
be the provision of programmes for British listeners ... I am in no way trying to excuse myself from responsibility. In the pressure of other duties I have not been so alert as I should have been in putting forward creative proposals ... At the same time I sense an unwillingness at home to include any but the minimum number of programmes from America and frequently a resistance to such suggestions as I from time to time put forward." (422)

Generally speaking what the B.B.C. took from America fell into two categories (which can be recognized as new versions of the "informative" and "characteristic" type of material): "firstly, American radio, which is a selection of the best and most suitable items from the American broadcasting repertoire, which probably has little bearing on America itself at all, but is representative of the broadcasting art as America sees it, and secondly, and much more important, a true picture of things that happen in America which we ought to be giving to our public in this country, but which probably has little or no bearing on what is broadcast in America at all." In B.B.C. internal memoranda, as here, the latter objective is given absolute priority. The organization of talks, documentaries, special reports on what were considered as important events by the British catalyzed most of the N.A.R.'s activities. This tells a lot about the steady reapplication of the B.B.C.'s educating philosophy. "The important thing to do is to concentrate" on this side of the American potentialities, the B.B.C. dictated, "keeping a certain amount of the former going. Satisfactorily to do this, we want, of course, to be as free of the broadcasting companies in America as we possibly can ... since we don't want to be dependent on the N.B.C. and Columbia for the sort of things we are most anxious to take from the U.S.A." (423)

Political considerations played a crucial role in the formulation of those official descriptions. The Scylla and Charybdis of the informative side of the B.B.C. American activities were the American sensitivity towards any form of British propaganda on one hand, and the British determination to keep under
control the U.S. image projected to British listeners on the other. If the B.B.C. North American office recognized both as matters of the greatest importance and worked at least partially as a specialized branch of the British Library of Information, (424) the appointment of the North American Representative symbolized first and foremost the inauguration of a new era in Anglo-American broadcasting, it presided over the multiplication of the channels through which American cultural influence could get to the British public and contributed to the struggle of Broadcasting House to condition and direct their stream.

Greene's first and foremost priority was to translate American programmes and events, recommend outstanding items and contact American artists to the benefit of British listeners. He ended up working for all the departments of the B.B.C. which were interested in obtaining American material. In February 1937, for instance, he managed to arrange the first Jack Benny broadcast to England. The American comedian was already well known in Britain through his films and in spite of a prevailing subtle disdain of his performances the B.B.C. admitted that "it was something of a 'scoop'" for Greene to get him. (425) The Radio Times introduced him as "America's radio humourist Number One" and presented the programme as the first "American Variety programme from the studio" heard in Britain. (426) By the end of the same year the North American office was already working at full steam and Greene was able to give the listeners at home details on future programmes from the United States. Plans for the Autumn included, apart from Swing's political commentaries (broadcast at 9.20 p.m. on Saturday evenings), a new entertainment programme ("Broadway Matinée") and a series of transmissions conveying a portrait of "real America." (427) Improvised collaborations could not be mentioned but would prove equally important.

"Broadway Matinée" was a half-hour variety series with which C.B.S. provided the B.B.C. from October 18, 1937. The idea behind it was "to search
New York each week for the latest talent." C.B.S., Greene explained, "intend ...

...to make it a fairly fast-moving and lively half-hour" but they were open to suggestions and critiques from London "if, after listening to the first few programs, you do not think it is what you want." (428) Like "Five Hours Back," "Broadway Matinée" was in fact what was called in the United States a sustaining programme. This meant that it was not sponsored (the B.B.C. would not allow advertising on British air) and the network executives could decide more or less freely (but under budget restrictions) how to conceive the programmes. Within the B.B.C. domestic programming "Broadway Matinée" was presented as a part of a series on "Variety from Abroad" which comprised relays from Vienna, Paris, Sweden, Milan, Prague, Berlin and the Netherlands. All were specially produced for British listeners. The American contribution, however, soon proved totally inadequate and the series was a flop. To the point that the N.A.R. proposed to go back to the familiar sounds of "Five Hours Back:" "I was hoping by this series to rid listeners of the memory of that ghastly 'Broadway Matinée' series of Columbia." (429) If difficulties and failures embittered on some occasions their pioneering initiatives, even from a quantitative point of view the work of the New York office was impressive. All in all, 120 relays from the United States were heard in England in 1937 "all but a handful" arranged specially by the B.B.C. New York staff. "They included dance bands, eye-witness accounts from scenes of disaster, sport commentaries, political talks by Swing, items by film stars, news talk and so forth." (430)

In one way or another, then, the B.B.C. consistently implemented its plans "to bring America to life for British listeners." (431) In spite of the "barrier of common speech," as the Listener paradoxically maintained, "trans-Atlantic broadcasting ... is one of the healthiest and strongest of sound broadcasting's younger children." (432) In the attempt to develop the informative side of his office's activities, in 1938 Greene first proposed a weekly "American Letter" by Alistair Cooke. "The interest in the series by
Swing has shown that there exists in Great Britain a powerful latent interest in American affairs," he maintained. "If such an astonishing number of people are willing to listen to a weekly commentary on American politics, I cannot help feeling that a far larger number would listen eagerly to a series on everyday American happenings." (433) Greene did not manage to convince Broadcasting House then. The famous series of Cooke's "Letters from America" had to wait till the beginning and the end of the war. After 1945 however they would become the single most popular item of the American informative policy of the B.B.C.

Meanwhile, trying to overcome a difficult start, the series "America Speaks" had gone on the air in February 1938. It consisted of political talks given by outstanding Americans (at one point it seemed that the President might appear in the series) "each speaker dealing with a particular subject on which he was an authority and consequently able to discuss the future." (434) As Greene would have soon discovered, to translate political talks given by prominent Americans into something suitable to British ears could be harder than expected. "The standard of broadcast speech here is terribly low," he would complain after the first broadcast. "The broadcasting companies here have done nothing to train their public men as we have attempted to do, with the result that they invariably fall into the faults of over-formality and stereotyped oratorical phrases." (435) It was just the latest demonstration of the differences in style of broadcast speech which Greene was by then perfectly aware of. Admiral Carpendale had talked about them in the very early days of the B.B.C. American adventure. In fact, if a common language allowed the broadcasting of spoken programmes from the Empire and the United States, a different culture rendered this comprehension more difficult than expected. In the broadcasting of public events, for instance, "in the case of America the language difficulty does not arise," Carpendale acknowledged, "but the vocabulary and methods of American commentators differ considerably from those
to which the British public is accustomed." (436) Greene's programme on the
Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans broadcast in February 1937 prompted a
discussion on similar themes evoking British, as opposed to American, methods
to run a radio commentary. Writing about Greene's (and Cooke's) performance on
that occasion, the B.B.C. Director of the Empire Service could not help saying:
"What a perfect example this was of American vs. British commentating, and how
much better our method of approach is. More and more we try to let the event
which we are putting over speak for itself. American technique seems to be the
maximum of previously prepared commentary during the period allotted to a
broadcast. What it proves is, I think, that when we do this kind of thing again
from America you should make every endeavour to get a special commentary done
for us in accordance with our requirements ... Reception was perfect but as
time went on I grew more and more impatient because we were getting none of the
real atmosphere of the proceedings. No doubt it was a remarkable performance as
judged by American commentating standards, but I am sure you will agree that we
don't want half an hour of this quick-fire commentary." (437) Greene's answer
was no less definitive: "I feel as you do, that if contributions from this side
are going to mean anything at all to British listeners we must become more and
more free from the companies here and put on our own programs in our own way." (438)

In the late 1930s there were better things to import from the United
States than broadcast speeches and "quick-fire" commentaries. After all,
"America Speaks" had not been conceived to arouse popular enthusiasm in
England. The real success for the B.B.C. New York office would come in 1938
with its outstanding musical programmes. Greene's activities in this field
occupied the ground broken in 1937 by Harman Grisewood and Leslie Perowne. The
B.B.C. producers had just done a series of gramophone programmes called 'Kings
of Jazz,' which apart from being an immediate success, marked the beginning of
a new musical era within the Corporation. (439) At the time "there was no
first-class British jazz, and the B.B.C. never really approved of the sort of noise that jazz made." (440) Since the late 1930s the atmosphere changed and the North American office nurtured with first-class material this new interest towards jazz. The prestigious "America Dances" series organized by the N.A.R. consisted of monthly relays of concerts by famous music stars such as Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie. They were conceived so as to give the British audience something which England could not offer. The "ordinary sweet bands," for instance, were excluded because "good as they are in their line, are not at all different from our best bands over here." (441) In that same promising year Alistair Cooke had started a new series called "I hear America Singing" wholly devoted to American folk music. "Musical See-Saw," (442) "Moods for Moderns" are the titles of other programmes based either entirely or in part on material rebroadcast from American stations. But the big hit in the musical programmes from the United States would be broadcast at the end of the year. Following an idea of Joe Marsala, who had played in one of the "America Dances" programmes, in November 1938 the B.B.C. New York office organized an informal party whose guests were the most famous jazz musicians then working in New York. The whole event was to be broadcast to Britain, specially arranged for British listeners. From the big hall of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where the party was held, "we hope," Greene wrote, "will be broadcast the greatest swing programme that has ever happened. It will be a real 'jam session.' Leading players from the outstanding swing orchestras have agreed to come and play; it is the first time that they have ever come to play together in a single programme." It was, Greene announced enthusiastically, an extraordinary event even by American standards. "This is a B.B.C. show and not arranged in any way by the American companies ... The programmes will not even be heard in the United States; it will be for the B.B.C. and the B.B.C. only. No American company has ever attempted a broadcast of this kind ... The title of the programme might well be 'B.B.C. Jam Session from New York'," he concluded.
Alastair Cooke compèred the show while the musicians almost casually took turns at the microphone. Jazz lovers rated it as one of the best jazz broadcasts ever heard. On January 20, 1939 the experiment was repeated on a smaller scale and it went equally well. So it was that Felix Greene managed to arrange the direct broadcasts of "two jam sessions with such glittering line ups that you might well wonder where the money came from to pay for them. The answer is money didn't pay for them; at least not in fees." (445)

There lay the secret, the real stroke of genius of the B.B.C. North American office. They had managed to organize an unheard of, exceptional event without incurring in enormous expenses. Financial considerations were indeed heavily conditioning their work in the United States and limiting the entertaining value of the material they could propose to London. Apart from strictly musical items, the variety programmes broadcast from America were therefore under-represented in the material filtered by the N.A.R. As had become apparent when "Five Hours Back" returned on the air three years earlier and as was later confirmed by the appalling results of "Broadway Matinée," it was not easy to import into Britain American entertainment programmes as such. "The reasons are several," wrote Felix Greene in 1938, "the chief of course being finance. America's second best variety is inferior to our own; America's best is bought by commercial companies and its cost to us becomes prohibitive." (446)

Besides comparative straitened circumstances, Greene's personal preferences and possibly the very quasi-political nature of the New York office also played a part in the expansion of the informative type of activities which indeed increasingly polarized the American B.B.C. towards the end of the decade. Also in this field however it was often the United States as seen by British broadcasters more than anything else which best suited the B.B.C. effort to project America - even when real Americans were invited to cooperate in the scripting. In May 1939 the B.B.C. activities on this particular field
attracted the attention of the U.S. Department of State. Greene had asked the radio division of the Works Progress Administration "to prepare, in cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation ... a dramatization of the work of that bureau in the fight against crime." While the B.B.C. was ready to arrange its broadcasts "with or without the assistance of the United States Government," (447) that very request prompted the Government intervention. The WPA was authorized to cooperate in the project. The Department of State, however, did not appreciate the draft of the programme which had been sent for supervision. George F. Messersmith, Assistant Secretary of State, found it gave a rather peculiar image of American life. "While the draft you sent is undoubtedly dramatic and presumably accurate, it presents a most unfortunate picture of this country. Moreover, while such a broadcast might serve a useful purpose in the United States in arousing public consciousness to existing evils, abroad its result might be very different and will certainly not result in increasing respect for this country. In the circumstances I can only regret that the first of a series of broadcasts which are to familiarize the British people with phases of American life should be devoted to its most seamy side." (448) What might sound as the foreseeable reaction of a worried diplomat nonetheless points to important aspects of the America which the B.B.C. New York office was projecting to England. The episode of the collaboration with the W.P.A. talks of the Corporation's effort to go beyond a rigid interpretation of its political duties towards an approach that hyper-sensitive politicians might suspect of anti-Americanism: indeed at a first reading the programme might be seen as fitting very well with the almost unconscious counter-myths of America which populated the British élites' imagery. (449) At a closer analysis however it would also seem the product of a wider approach to documentary radio, the result of the multiplication of possible subjects of inquiry, the answer to new curiosities. In this sense it can also be seen as a
sign of a new use of the media, the symptom of the controlled opening up of
cultural frontiers which international broadcasting necessarily brought about.

Apart from its political implications, then, the very existence of the
N.A.R. had two broad consequences on the B.B.C. and on the listeners’ radio
diet: on one side, it spread among a wide public a greater familiarity with
U.S. facts and ideas, but on the other it institutionalized the filtering role
of the Corporation. In September 1938 the Listener commented: "Up till 1932 a
programme from America ... was an attraction because it was a novelty ... Today
far more relays are taken by the B.B.C. from American than from any other
foreign source, and the B.B.C. employs a special representative in North
America but no similar official in any other country ... The fact that there is
a demand, and a steadily growing demand, in this country for programmes from
the U.S. is the best evidence of the work which broadcasting is doing for the
cause of friendship and understanding between the two nations." (450)

Whether the final aim was to promote a better understanding or to fill up
the broadcasting day, the late 1930s undoubtedly witnessed a steady increase in
the inclusion of American material in British programming. A good percentage of
it was America-British style. That American stuff needed to be Britishized
before being imported had already become an undisputed principle of the B.B.C.
activities in the United States. As far as the "characteristic" America was
concerned an increased familiarity with U.S. broadcasting seemed to produce
increased awareness of the differences in style. It was Noel Ashbridge, the
B.B.C. Chief Engineer, who upon his arrival in the United States in 1934 had
described the outdistancing effect of getting in touch with the 'real' America:
"Naturally I had heard a great deal about American programmes before I arrived
in New York. My first impression was one of surprise, in that the programmes
were far more 'American' and much more different from ours than I anticipated." (451)
The perception of the strangeness of the American programmes did not lessen the interest the B.B.C. continued to show in them, however. Parodies were originally built upon and further nurtured a feeling of cultural distance and the apparently conflicting assumption of a certain degree of familiarity between the two countries. The North American Representative worked on the assumption that America was interesting but its descriptions and representations had to be reinterpreted to be faithful to truth. Ironically, while reciprocal awareness was increasing, and purposeful attempts were being made to translate, import, or keep out certain products of American broadcasting, their overall presence was growing well beyond any institutional channel.

4.5 - Importing Ideas from the U.S.A. in the Late 1930s

That the general style was different, at least as much as the single productions, was endlessly repeated and continuously re-discovered in the late 1930s not less than in the early history of the B.B.C. What became increasingly impressive however were the indirect ways through which American material increasingly filtered through the most unpredictable channels and influenced the B.B.C. output in spite of all the differences recorded.

While Greene was multiplying his efforts to impress a uniform mark on American importations, the individual broadcasters established every day new channels of communications with their American colleagues. Differences in approach could indeed result in stimulating new ideas which the B.B.C. producers were always starving for. Furthermore, insofar as actual contacts and exchanges stimulated a feeling of cultural distances, they also produced each day detailed information on a cultural industry which was far more diverse than any description could allow for. Among the numerous productions imported from the United States in fact there were also genuine American programmes which,
apart from being interesting and technically very good, were different from their British equivalent but equally suitable to be part of the B.B.C. output.

In 1937 for instance even the B.B.C. Drama Department found it needed some kind of contact with the U.S. networks, if not for its most typical productions. In the early days of broadcasting American radio drama had always been considered as second-rate by the U.S. stations themselves. (452) For quite a long time the B.B.C. looked down on the American dramatic productions generally considered as unworthy of any attention. (453) "With the exception of certain crude vaudeville sketches" wrote the Radio Times, as late as 1935, "in the States plays ... find no place on the air." (454) Still in the early 1930s radio drama was one area of broadcasting where British producers visiting the United States could do it from a position of supremacy. So it was that when, in 1930, the N.B.C. invited Cecil Lewis, former Director of Programmes at the B.B.C., then radio dramatist and producer, he unusually went as a master rather than as a learning pupil, "to initiate experiments in a more ambitious form of radio drama than has hitherto been attempted in the States." (455) Not much is known of the reasons given by the Americans to justify this visit. The B.B.C. ascribed it to the outstanding quality of its own dramatic productions with which U.S. broadcasting compared, it maintained, rather unfavourably.

Upon his return to England Lewis wrote a number of detailed articles (which appeared on the Radio Times) dealing with what he had discovered about the "fundamentally different conception that America has of broadcasting" as it applied to radio drama. What had shocked him most, Lewis recounted, was that "their programme heads were quite convinced it would be impossible to interest the American listener in a play lasting such a length of time [one hour and a half or two hours]." American radio plays rarely lasted longer than 30 minutes. (456) Indeed, an internal summary on the audience response to special programmes drawn up in 1927 reported that long plays had been much more successful than short ones in Britain in the previous year. (457) Besides, the
"strict attention to timing" imposed by the commercial sponsors to U.S. broadcasting stations was always perceived as a cultural eccentricity by the British. (458) Secondly, Lewis went on, he was amazed to discover that "the multi-studio method, now a matter of routine at Savoy Hill, is unknown in the States." Lewis was referring to the complicated technique which the B.B.C. utilized for its dramatic productions since the mid-1920s. The basic idea it was built upon was that different studios should be employed for speech, effects and music; its corollary was that, in order to give the producer a complete control of all the effects "which might be taking place in the different studios," the "dramatic control panel" had to be introduced, that is to say "a scheme for a listening and control room to act as a nerve centre for all productions and rehearsals requiring more than one studio for their performance." (459) Abandoned during the war for lack of studio accommodation, this elaborate technique was never re-adopted. At the time of Lewis's visit to the American studios, however, the B.B.C. was convinced that it was the only method which would guarantee a certain standard of quality (460) along with long repeated rehearsals (much longer than Americans thought necessary). Furthermore, Lewis reported, "the engineers expected me to use separate microphones, one for each actor, in the same studio ... I protested violently! How could you expect two people to play a love scene or a quarrel, working several feet away from each other on separate microphones? They would be working in a vacuum." (461)

That master-to-pupil scandalized attitude changed slightly in the following years. Almost abruptly, in the mid-Thirties, radio drama received a greater impulse in the United States. A part from the "spectacular growth of the daytime serial or 'soap opera,'" (462) more 'serious' endeavours were also undertaken. Cooperation with the movie industry was eventually achieved to the great advantage of the networks. In 1934 the "Lux Radio Theatre" made its first appearance, originally as a series of radio adaptations of Broadway dramas then
as a major container for Hollywood productions. In a couple of years it became almost as popular as the most famous comedians. (463) Radio Pictorial immediately took it as the perfect example to demonstrate how good American sustaining programmes could be compared to their British equivalents. And it was no wonder, as the U.S. networks had at their disposal, as the title of the article suggested "Millions of pounds for programmes." (464)

Thanks to those millions, the C.B.S. embarked upon an even more ambitious project: it started out a project to give way to experimental radio drama conceived so as to satisfy certain aesthetic and cultural standards rather than to appeal to popular audiences. Started as a "by-product of commercial success" (465) the Columbia Workshop produced from 1936 on what was judged as an outstanding series of dramatic programmes. So good that it even attracted the attention of the B.B.C. Drama Department, starving for new ideas to regenerate its programmes. As a matter of fact, in terms of audience ratings, radio drama did not enjoy a better fate in England than in the States in the inter-war years. In the course of its first enquiry into listening habits, pursued in 1937, the Audience Research Service discovered that while broadcast plays had a reasonably significant audience, they were often judged as excessively complicated, even, or especially so, those written for radio (466) and that listeners, even those who followed the programmes, did not seem to enjoy them. Also Val Gielgud, B.B.C. Productions Director since 1929 and main inspirer of the B.B.C. policy on radio drama till the early 1950s had to admit that "even as late as 1939 the broadcasting of plays was generally considered to be one of minority appeal." (467)

New ideas, no matter how experimental and minority-oriented they might appear, immediately captured the attention of producers always looking for suitable material. In September 1937 Gielgud announced his intention to follow in the steps of the Americans. In its "Experimental Hour" series the B.B.C. would not only reconstruct some of those American productions but also try as
their American colleagues had done before them, "to provide programmes that will on the one hand interest the minority audience whose entertainment depends less on absolute popularity than on novelty and technical virtuosity, and on the other give producers opportunities for trial and error, the results of which it is not fair to inflict at the average listener at what may be termed peak programme hours." (468) Eventually, contrary to the most reasonable expectations, the audience response was encouraging, (469) and the quality of the productions interesting.

A highlight of the series was "Job to be Done," "a faithful reconstruction" of a Columbia broadcast produced with an entirely British staff upon an American script. In England it was transmitted in August 1938, three months after the original American production. Described as a "factual drama" the play was "based on official reports and on Government case histories." "The broadcast begins with a panorama of American industry," the Radio Times announced, "and moves into a close-up of a great automobile assembling point. Sales drop, production is cut, workers are laid off. The programme follows one of them who heads West looking for work. We have not heard this programme broadcast, but from reading the script," the B.B.C. magazine concluded, "we expect it to make a sensation here." (470) And it did. To the point that not only it was repeated the next week, but it remained somehow in the history of "features" programmes. (471) Difference, then, did not necessarily mean that real "American" programmes could not enjoy popularity in England, nor that they could not have admirable qualities by B.B.C. standards. On the contrary, "Job to Be Done" attained a very particular importance also because it was purposefully presented by the B.B.C. as a "typically" American production and listeners were invited to compare it with a good B.B.C. feature programme. The production presented as the British equivalent of "Job to Be Done", broadcast that same week, was the work of D. G. Bridson, known in Britain as the producer of the "March of the '45," an outstanding example of the genre. (472)
"Coronation Scot" (this was the title of Bridson's "all-British" production) was less of a dramatization and more of a documentary in the strict sense. It traced "the journey of the famous express from London to Glasgow, with all the changes of scene through which it passes." (473) It drew its appeal from the emotions aroused by the suggestive descriptions of landscapes rather than on any individual involvement with its characters, unlike its American equivalent. In this sense, the two programmes did envisage a difference in approach which can be immediately recognized. Another comparison could however be done following different criteria. Bridson himself would have rated "Job To Be Done", his American competitor, as a remarkable production. It "impressed me," he recalled, "as a splendid piece of social protest," and then added, "such as I dispaired of getting the B.B.C. to let me write about unemployment nearer home." (474)

In the boundless scenario of things American almost every individual broadcaster in Britain could find something to meditate upon. So it was that ideas, showmen, formats from the U.S. filtered through the national frontiers drawn up by the B.B.C. without even having to declare their country of origin. So it was that in many circumstances U.S. broadcasting became the almost unnamed (to the public) but universal reservoir of solutions to particular problems which the B.B.C. did not seem able to solve by itself.

The comparative weight of American influence in the determination of the B.B.C. output at this level was enormous. Various examples can be cited to illustrate its importance since the beginning of the 1930s. (475) It grew stronger where or when the B.B.C. did not succeed in finding its own resources. So it was, for instance, that U.S. broadcasting increasingly appeared to the B.B.C. Variety staff as a fruitful source of inspiration. An ambiguous source, probably, looked at ambiguously, but still observed attentively. Not only Americans were invited to England to offer their services, but variety
producers on the verge of a crisis of creativity were encouraged to go to the States.

This was particularly true in the field of radio comedy. The B.B.C. knew that it had one of its most sensitive weak points precisely in this particular kind of light entertainment. The training of radio comedians was proving a much longer process than the quick pace of broadcasting could afford. Artificial stimulants had to be found to fill the spaces which the Corporation did not seem able to cover adequately. In 1933 the debate on suitable methods to overcome this difficulty was brought to the public attention. The 6th Annual Report of the B.B.C. confessed that "the problem of conveying humour by merely oral methods within the limitations of microphone and programme policy has not yet been solved." (476) The easiest way out, the Corporation managers declared, was to appoint a good American gag-writer who could enliven the comedians' scripts or to employ American comedians. Both strategies were adopted. Indeed, by the late Thirties many American artists had become perennial favourites in England. Arthur Tracy, the "Street Singer," Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyons, Kimberley and Page, and, last but not least, Vic Oliver, were among the most famous. Yet, once again, the degree of Americanization which they introduced in British broadcasting is most unclear. In most cases they had to adapt and translate themselves, play with their Americanness, so as to be understood and appreciated in Britain. Vic Oliver was a perfect model of that process of "Britishization." Austrian by birth, naturalized American in the late 1920s, he was described as "the prize example of an American actually built up in England by the B.B.C." (477) He himself was perfectly aware of the existence of cultural boundaries. Commenting upon his first British performance (a sketch at the London Palladium with Margaret Crangle) in 1931 he acknowledged: "the act had fallen flat, not because of the audiences, who were ready enough to laugh but because ... our jokes just failed to register. References to the American slump, to American brands of food, even to American
slang terms, which have long since become well known in this country, were not understood." Then, he recalls, in the next act he was asked to stage in Britain he astutely included a parody of commercial broadcasting "and this idea" as it could have been expected "was a vast success." (478) Most of the American artists who began to appear regularly in the B.B.C. show were then somehow Britishized probably not less than the American material which the N.A.R. was sending to Broadcasting House.

Most entertainment programmes increasingly imported from the United States went through a similar contaminating process. Relays, parodies, programmes produced within the U.S. boundaries and American artists apart, in the second half of the 1930s also made their appearance "Americanized" programmes. (479) And in a much larger degree than the B.B.C. was willing to acknowledge. Exaggerating a tendency which was undoubtedly getting stronger, in May 1938 the Radio Pictorial informed its readers that "most of the B.B.C.'s ideas came from America." (480)

On May 1, 1936 (Eddie Pola had recently parodied American artists in one of his "America Calling" programme), the B.B.C. broadcast its first amateurs' hour. The idea (and the name) came from across the Atlantic where it had already risen to the rank of top radio show. Invented in 1934 by Major Bowes, the show offered talented participants coming from all over the country the opportunity to be heard on radio. In the original American version, contestants competed for prizes but were also lured to the broadcasting stage by the prospect of being discovered by talent scouts. (481) The amateur hour's success was immediate and sudden all over the United States, in networks' as well as in local broadcasting.

When the B.B.C. decided to follow the American example and invite amateur artists to its microphones it could have appeared as a complete surrender to the latest American craze. Yet it was not, as the Radio Times stressed. "The fact that amateurs are to be given an hour's broadcast ... does not mean that
the B.B.C. is going all American," it warned. There were remarkable differences
between the two national versions, it went on with a sort of tacit feeling of
superiority. "No gong will cut short an act that flops — indeed, there is no
reason to expect that any act would flop; nor will the park benches be thickly
strewn with amateurs sleeping out before walking home." It would all be much
more respectable than that. "These amateurs will be drawn from the leading
amateur dramatic and operatic societies." (482)

The difference in style and in conception, the claim to a British original
paternity to the genuine idea was further stressed by the producer of the
programme, Gale Pedrick. He explained that similar experiments had been tried
by the B.B.C. Northern Regional staff and had produced interesting material.
"But never before," he stressed, "has there been sent out from London to Great
Britain and the Empire a programme that shows what the amateur can do in the
field of popular entertainment." He too thought it necessary to explicitly
distinguish his show from its American version. "Radio listeners know all about
that talent-seeking business, America's ' Amateur Hour.' Our May-Day 'Hour' is
given by amateurs in the true sense, men and women who are jealous of their
amateur status." (483) Furthermore, while amateur shows in America usually
featured singers along with tap dancers, yodelers and one-man bands, and almost
any other kind of entertainers, (484) depending on the individual's enthusiasm
and self-promoting energies, the British show was gravely presented as a
programme of "Amateur songs from the shows" — 'by artists from Amateur Operatic
and Dramatic Societies." (485) In spite of a certain solemnity, the radio
audience responded with enthusiasm. Since then, amateur hours, under one form
or another, became a staple element of the B.B.C. output no less, perhaps more,
than of the American stations (where they was quickly ousted by other
inventions).

By 1937, in fact, U.S. broadcasting audiences were already devoted to a
new craze: "Spelling Bees" were all the rage. Almost a childish game, based as
the "Amateur Hour" on audience participation, "Spelling Bee" shows consisted of spelling contests whose winners were given an immediate reward in cash prizes. Quick reactions and an excellent knowledge of the written language were the contestants' winning qualities. Personal pride and excitement at the fast transfer of money such as the show conveyed were its powerful appeals. The audience responded impressively. Millions of listeners caught the "Spelling Bee" fever. The basic conception of the "Spelling Bees" was simple but very effective, well suited to the peculiarities of radio entertainment. Even the B.B.C. acknowledged the success of the formula and its potential interest. Given the rising popularity of the American "Spelling Bee," given also their potential educating value British broadcasters at one point decided they could try to import the idea.

The N.B.C. participated in the production of the first transatlantic "Spelling Bees" broadcast in England (and in the United States) on January 30, 1938. It was, in characteristically B.B.C. condescending style, a Harvard, and Radcliffe, vs. Oxford contest. The British compère, Thomas Woodroofe, introduced it, this time explicitly, as an American importation: "Spelling bees are not a familiar pastime in this country but in America they are pursued with general enthusiasm, and have become quite an expert business." (486)

Since this very first show, however, it was apparent that the original American idea would undergo significant modifications. To begin with, as far as the very motivation of the game was concerned, the B.B.C. could not dispense cash. The whole approach had then to be adapted to a radically different spirit of competition. And so it was. In March the first all-British "Spelling Bee" show was broadcast, to meet with the pressing requests of the listeners. Radio Pictorial complained that on the part of the B.B.C. it had been what looked like an awkward reaction. "Why is it that the B.B.C. has been so slow to appreciate the appeal of this form of entertainment, and so loth to follow where America leads the way? The B.B.C. has its own representative in New York
whose job is to pick up new ideas for transportation over here, and famous variety chiefs such as Eric Maschwitz have been in constant touch with the American studios. Yet the Spelling Bee was a radio feature for many years in the States before it was given its tardy radio début in this island. It is the same story of the Amateur Hour all over again." (487) Furthermore, the magazine complained, the trip across the Atlantic had devitalized the programme. Not only had the thrilling prospect of cash prizes been eliminated. The whole atmosphere was much graver; the exciting pace of the American show in the hands of the B.B.C. became the impersonal delivering of a teaching session. (488)

It was, it was claimed on this side of the Atlantic, a return to the spelling contests' true nature. After all, spelling bees used to be known in England. "It used to be a popular pastime encouraged by schoolmasters," Radio Pictorial recalled. Then, "although" it "practically died out in England ..., it continued to be played in America, Australia, and the other countries overseas." (489) Its re-appearance under the auspices of a U.S. network, the B.B.C. itself maintained, was another example of the "American habit of returning to us our own tradition under the guise of novelties." (490) To return to the real spirit of the game, then, the B.B.C. had to re-Britishized it, and fit it into a much longer tradition than the Americans could even conceive. Anyway, wherever the idea first came from, and in whatever form it got to the United Kingdom, British listeners liked it and kept asking for more. (491) However, it is hard to say whether they would have liked the original American better, as the Radio Pictorial seemed to imply.

The list of explicitly Americanized programmes did not end there, though. There were individual programmes inspired to U.S. productions. (492) Jam sessions (so effectively arranged by the B.B.C. New York office) were originally an American idea. "In Town Tonight," a very popular show which tried to mix entertainment and information by getting unusual or very important people to the microphone was also based on successful American productions.
Also formats which had acquired popularity in America were increasingly adopted by the B.B.C. (but gradually and with a certain reluctance). The "fixed point" system, "long familiar in American commercial radio," was not yet fully developed in Britain in the late 1930s (as it would be after the war). Indeed, "besides the News, religious services, charity appeals, and 'service' broadcasts meant specifically for farmers, seamen, and other special categories of listeners, there were some broadcasts that came at the same hour and on the same day every week (and these included the most popular), but many more that dodged about from week to week." (494) There was an important exception, though. "Band Waggon," perhaps the single most popular continuity show before the war (495) was purposefully built upon an original American inspiration and it was explicitly meant to build up on a regular timing. Arthur Askey, who was asked to conduct the show, recalls the days in which the programme was first conceived. "John Watt [the B.B.C. Director of Variety] asked me to call and see him ... He told me that the B.B.C. was thinking of doing what they did on radio in America: having big comedy shows at a certain time on a certain night of the week ... There was a popular radio show in America at that time called The Band Wagon." (496) The title was then copied (but the British version remained mainly a comedy show while its American model was more of a musical programme) and the continuity idea was adopted. "Band Waggon" was first broadcast on January 5, 1938. Its success established it as the archetype for entertainment regular featured programmes whose main appeal resided in repetitivity and familiar characters and situations.

Furthermore, in 1939 the closest approximation to a real quiz show, "Information, please," went on the air. "A team of experts is lined up," the Radio Times anticipated, "in the studio to answer questions set by listeners, the advantage being that anybody in the team can answer any question, so a listener who beats all the experts can really feel proud." Here was audience participation in impeccable American style. Besides, if the listener won, the
B.B.C. was prepared to give away cash prizes (in its own way): "Incidentally he will be able to feel charitable for the B.B.C. will give 5 shillings to the Week's Good Cause every time the team goes down." "This idea," the B.B.C. magazine concluded, "has been very popular in America, under the title 'Information, please.'" (497)

But the picture would not be complete if extensive mention was not made of the "anti-American" side of the B.B.C. activities. Within the B.B.C. there were people who worried about the increasing Americanization of the Corporation's output. The history of the defences set up by the British broadcasters to stem American influence is at least as old as the channels established to get in touch with it. The discussion on whether American material and ideas should be kept within certain limits was already at a mature stage in 1929. Since then, a long story began which ran parallel to the actual opening up of cultural frontiers and reveals a more or less explicit, more or less consistent, often wholly ineffectual policy of cultural protectionism. The effort to preserve certain national characteristics and habits, common to most people who worked at the B.B.C., had widely different applications. There were those, who, like Felix Greene, thought that America was different but fascinating, that exchanges had to be as frequent as possible, provided that good translators could be found to render the two cultures intelligible to the ordinary listener of the foreign country. There were a few enthusiastic pro-Americans who would have simply built up as many channels of communication as possible. But there were also those, a majority within the higher echelons of the B.B.C. hierarchy till the late 1930s, who were mostly worried about keeping American imports to a minimum.

Understandably, the official position of the B.B.C. on the question of Americanization (as can be guessed from its publications) was that British programmes were not, and should never be, overwhelmingly Americanized; that British listeners would not have liked it either; but that the Corporation on
its part did not favour the idea of an explicit censorship to ban, or reduce, material coming, under one guise or another, from the other side of the Atlantic. On the contrary, the B.B.C. had appointed a North American Representative to facilitate exchanges and it had always encouraged its employees to visit the United States. It regularly received publications reporting the latest news on what was going on in American broadcasting. It promoted, among its listeners, a greater familiarity with various aspects of American life.

4.6 - Resisting Americanization.

All in all, then, when seen from a more superficial point of view than the process of adaptation of American material would suggest, (498) in the 1920s and 1930s the B.B.C. was indeed increasingly "Americanized," exposed as it chose to be to American broadcasting methods, formats, styles and ideas. (499) Relays, or rebroadcast programmes, had multiplied. The B.B.C. had established a permanent office in New York to keep up the contacts with U.S. networks. American music and artists, actors and comedians as well as musicians, were becoming each day more familiar to British audiences. A certain feeling of what it sounded like living in the United States had been conveyed to this side of the Atlantic. British listeners could indeed shiver at the same radio games which swept the Americans off their feet.

Yet, the thorny question of the extent of American material to be included in the B.B.C. programmes was far from resolved. Both in the internal correspondence and on the various publications of the Corporation, the policy of defence of the national culture seemed to go hand in hand with the efforts (or the unavoidable acceptance) of contacts. It changed substantially, over the years; its results, its openness varied adapting themselves to a world where cultural and professional exchanges across national boundaries were spontaneously increasing.
The more nationalist approach to American programmes started out as an overt condemnation of their commercialism and resulting degenerated products. So, while governmental and parliamentary committees were exorcising the chaos brought forward by the institutional arrangements under which American broadcasting was flourishing, the broadcasters also were taking up positions. Since the late 1920s, the Radio Times began publishing quite regularly short flashes on American broadcasting which tended to emphasize its less appealing aspects. Slowly an unfavourable image of American programmes was built up. Criticisms were usually directed against the "apparent" greater choice of programmes offered to the American listener which, it was often argued, amounted to an obsessive multiplication of very similar items. A part from the irritating practice of interrupting programmes with commercials, the existence of sponsors, it was argued, seemed to limit creativity. "All these advertisers go for the sure popular hit," wrote the Listener in 1930. "The song is always 'Roses in Picardy', 'I'm Crazy About You' or something like that; the humour is always about an Irish cop or a Jewish tailor." "Nothing could be more disastrous than an attempt to imitate American methods," (500) was the usual conclusion - whose credibility however tended to diminish (for the B.B.C. staff no less than for its listeners) as American material increasingly intermingled with B.B.C. productions. Over the years, in fact, U.S. broadcasting, attracting more and more money, tended to produce more varied and better programmes. That the professionals might have needed American inspiration however did not wipe away the B.B.C. efforts to stand up against the Americanization of its culture.

Those resistance devices were concentrated on particularly sensitive issues where American influence seemed more threatening. Sensitivity on musical items, for instance, was very soon particularly high. While there certainly was an important economic side to it (the record industry was heavily dependent upon American products, on one side, and on "song plugging" on the other) (501) there also was since the very beginning a conscious effort to build up a
consistent strategy. In 1926, the B.B.C. music critic could present to the Crawford Committee a report on American broadcasting stating bluntly that in the United States "the value of intelligent use of the Radio as a means of musical culture is ... not only almost unrecognized as yet, but such use is at present ... almost impossible." (502) By then signs had already appeared of a proclaimed attempt on the part of the B.B.C. to defend and encourage British musicians at the expense of their American colleagues (insofar as this proved feasible without provoking the violent reactions of the audience). (503) In 1928 a debate was started which would have gone on for months. It concerned the future of English jazz and the necessity to cope with the powerful influence of American artists on modern music. (504)

The conviction that those influences could be resisted was not consistently maintained in the years that followed. It was nonetheless kept alive by the linked assumption that a responsible national institution such as the B.B.C. had the duty to defend the national culture. Those who at the time had publicly declared their worries over the future of English jazz, for instance, did it on the assumption that British musicians did not need to be Americanized to be modern, a conviction which the B.B.C. shared with at least some of its listeners. (505) Yet it was all very controversial, since the very beginning and not only in the elitist minds of the B.B.C. managers. The whole issue of music and the way the B.B.C. handled it illustrate the difficulties and ambiguities of the national, or nationalist, policies pursued by the broadcasting Corporation. (506) In February 1928 the Wireless League, founded by Lord Beaverbrook in 1925 to give non-broadcasters a voice on broadcasting matters, found that "the public" (unspecified) was rather happy with the Corporation's "evident desire ... to remove causes of complaint." It was discovered, however, "that the most outstanding complaint concerns the broadcasting of 'syncopated' items ... the accent with which the announcements relayed from outside sources are made is probably affected for we are loath to
believe that Americans are predominant in London orchestras and dance bands" (507) - a comment which reveals how widespread were both Americanized styles and anti-American reactions.

Christopher Stone himself, the early B.B.C. authority on dance music, had confessed his dislike of American tunes. When he was asked to produce a programme of new grammophone records broadcast by the B.B.C. since 1927 for instance Stone felt he was trapped between two opposite choices over the issue American vs. British music. "Here and there all over the country were listeners who were definitely interested in 'Le Hot' and frightfully keen to hear the latest effort from America," he writes. However, "if I included one hot record in each weekly programme it poisoned the whole programme for quite a number of listeners; for modern American dance rhythms do not merely bore the people who do not like them - they infuriate them and shock them profoundly." (508) The only way out, which did not solve the cultural conflict but allowed it room for expressing itself was "to segregate 'hot American dance music' into an occasional special programme" where he concentrated "these transatlantic extravagances." The programmes were a great success, Stone admitted, "and the only blot on them was the faint scoff in my voice when I presented them." (509)

Soon it was discovered that a struggle to keep music British had to be inscribed in a more general picture. While the effort to resist American influence was never an inflexible strategy consistently pursued in every direction and by every department of the Corporation, since the late 1920s every once in a while somebody within the B.B.C. management kicked it up and dramatically exorted the staff to fight in defence of the threatened national traditions. This is precisely what Gerald Cock, the Director of Outside Broadcasting, started out to do in November 1929, (510) when he decided to circulate a memorandum warning against the growing power of the American entertainment industry. His call to arms gives a new meaning to the never-ending jeremiads on the destiny of British music.
Cock, as he made immediately clear, was not only nor mainly concerned with the purity of British mass culture. The United States, he maintained, represented a much more palpable danger than that. The tendency to retain artists under monopolistic control might extend beyond American frontiers; soon the B.B.C. might be unable to contract individually its performers, as they would be all tied up with exclusive contracts like their colleagues in the United States. The "American octopus" was gaining control of the entertainment industry all over the world. Against that advance "there is left but one strong point ... namely the B.B.C." The fighting, if tough, was not over yet. Adequate resources had to be summoned in order to set up successful strategies of resistance, though. "Without an intelligence organisation, it is practically impossible to obtain sufficiently exact and up-to-date information, and one can only suspect tendencies, and guess facts which might be vital in clearing up a doubtful situation, still more in planning counter-action." Nonetheless, as any good general in a critical, almost hopeless situation, Cock indicated "possible lines of action" which went from "carefully organised propaganda in the hands of an efficient intelligence department," to legislation to both "ensure the establishment of a 'free market' in film entertainment in this country" and to adequately support entertainment and "strengthen the industry." Cock also gave the B.B.C. an internal aim: "the maintenance of our programmes over the next few critical years at the highest possible standard of entertainment and popularity. Goodwill on the part of the public will be of the greatest importance." (511)

In July 1930, just a few months after the circulation of Cock's memorandum, Stone devoted a special gramophone recital to British Dance Numbers so that the listeners could decide for themselves "the vexed question of the merits of our native composers whose tunes are said to be the equal of those sedulously imported from America." (512) His programme was part of the strategy to counteract U.S. cultural and economic influence (particularly evident in the
gramophone industry) which Cock had been pointing at. Others were invited to join in the effort. The Director of Programmes wrote to the Head of Drama in September of the same year asking for his cooperation. "In line with our desire to do what we can for British authors and composers, and which desire is being transmuted into practical terms by the introduction of a British dance music period in our programmes, I should like to discuss with you the possibility of introducing from time to time an all British vaudeville hour where material other than dance music would be used." (513)

Gradually, at the beginning of the 1930s, a sort of disquieting optimism spread within the British Corporation. A Radio Times editorial published in October 1931 fell short of propagating explicit racist themes. It opened announcing the existence of "signs of optimism in the post-war world." The marked decline of jazz "and the compensating demand for music of a less narcotic order" was one of these signs and it was exemplified by the national provenance of Jack Payne's repertory. Reciprocal percentages were calculated, the results giving a reassuring 50% of British, a 40% of American and a 10% of Continental tunes. (514) "The melancholy of the Negro is moving and understandable in its original form," the article conceded; "the time is past, however, when British listeners will be content with the cut-to-pattern perversion of it with which the Jewish composers of New York anaesthetize the frayed nerves of America." (515) It is true that sixteen months later the B.B.C. magazine would publish another editorial maintaining the opposite. (516) It is equally true that the B.B.C. could not outlaw American music. But it could present American attitudes towards music and broadcasting in general as despicable. A rather typical article exemplifying an undercurrent, commonsensical hostility to things American appeared for instance on the Listener in 1932. It was not as aggressive as the one quoted above but it conveyed a series of stereotypes which monotonously recurred in the B.B.C. public reports on American programmes. It dealt, once again, and not
surprisingly given the threats indicated by Cock, with musical items as broadcast by the U.S. networks. "It is true that there are listeners in this country who from time to time complain that the B.B.C. does not give them all the music they want. But what would they say to having concertos spread over two evenings, symphonies sandwiched between 'barrel-organ excerpts' to give programme 'balance', and the tempo of performances speeded up to put 'new vitality' into old scores? Yet these are all accepted features of American sponsored programmes." (517) The fight was extending beyond individual radio programmes. As Cock's conclusions somehow anticipated, an out and out campaign to advertise the comparative merits of the B.B.C. productions was tacitly under way. Its slogans and themes confused the issues, the image it diffused of U.S. broadcasting contrasted sharply with the ambiguous relationship the B.B.C. was actually entertaining with it. What was American (and British) at this more rarefied level almost never coincided with what seemed American (and British) in the realities of programme production. Still, those drastic statements brought out an aspect of the cultural climate in which the radio programmes were conceived. Simplifying an excessively confused relationship they revealed the existence of a much simpler attitude no less real, no less resultful.

Those simplified attitudes towards America varied over the years. A change in public attitudes seem to have gradually intervened and seemed at some point to be able to bridge the gap between the devilish America of those who hated its commercialism and the daily intercourse with U.S. broadcasting which characterized the history of the B.B.C. When, in the mid-1930s, for instance, crooners invaded Britain from the United States and came to be identified with the latest American music by those who hated them, the Radio Times tried to dissociate the phenomenon and the country of origin much more wisely than it had done with jazz a few years before. (518) Even more radically, the jam sessions organized by Greene (and immediately before that the jazz programmes
produced by Harman Grisewood) did symbolize a sort of turning point, a more relaxed attitude on the part of the B.B.C. towards American music.

So when, in 1936, while the North American Representative was being appointed, C. G. Graves, at that time B.B.C. Controller (Programmes) asked the Corporation's heads of departments to give opinions and data concerning the Americanization of the programmes, reactions still varied but the more moderate opinion seemed to have gained strength. True, there still were those who thought that broadcasting should have been much more protectionist than it was. John Coatman, for instance, Senior News Editor, could still answer Graves' request, speaking "of America as a country completely composed of barbarians."

More and more, however, broadcasters thought that "irrespective of nationality, we must think in terms of good broadcasting." This meant that "a programme of American idiom," for instance, "would best be presented ... by an American announcer or at any rate someone with American methods, and that it would be better to drop programmes with an American background altogether rather than attempt to present them in a hybrid kind of way." In a perfect parallel, "such English institutions as 'Music Hall' or Variety shows generally" should maintain their national flavour and keep out American styles.

So there seemed to be a point where the defence of certain national characteristics did coincide with good broadcasting.

But the B.B.C. management had another problem. If it seemed reasonable to get rid of those anti-American policies which would have affected the standard of programmes, it was equally necessary to establish and therefore defend a limit to the introduction of U.S. stuff. Then, within the 1936 grand reckoning an attempt was also made to produce reliable data which would quantify the extent of the "Americanization," identified, within the specific area of broadcasting, with the "programmes which are considered American in their form." Unfortunately, no clear explanation was given of the indicators which would have characterised a programme as "American in its form." Anyway, a
figure was given. All in all, it was said, the American programmes did "not amount to more than about 5% of the whole output" of the Variety department — the most directly affected and most vulnerable to the lure of American broadcasting. (522) Everybody seemed to agree that it was satisfactorily low, even those staff who most strongly opposed anti-American policies. Eric Maschwitz, Director of Variety, had always been considered a (moderate) pro-American. (523) Answering the Controller of Programme request, he minimized the issue and explained bluntly his views: "With regard to the Americanization (so called) of our programmes, here again I think it most unwise to generalise. Out of our whole repertory of light programmes we have only three which are American in character ... No American note enters into any other programme ... Dance music must unfortunately be somewhat American in character because of its origin and the fact that the words of most of the dance songs if sung in any other accent but an American one sound even more idiotic than they actually are." (524) According to Maschwitz, it was not something one should really be obsessed with; the whole matter of the amount of American material influencing the B.B.C. output seemed more the product of reasonable fears than a sensible approach to the actual content of the British radio programmes. Incidentally, the Radio Pictorial managed to joke about that peculiar B.B.C. obsession. "This Council conclave" it wrote of the General Advisory Council meetings, "is hush-hush, but you will be interested to know that when the variety discussion is over somebody pops up and says, 'Aren't we getting too many American acts at the microphone now?' He throws a bombshell into the meeting, till the figures are produced." The popular radio magazine agreed with Maschwitz that the answer would have been in the negative. "Look at the figures," it argued. "In one period of three months the B.B.C. booked 13,622 artists; 376 were foreign." (525)

Yet Graves was not convinced by Maschwitz's reassuring remarks. Understandably so, as he knew how reality could easily defy the most generous,
determined efforts. The fate of "Music Hall," a popular show where well-known artists were presented along with debutants, (526) to cite the best known example, soon illustrated how those general statements would be transformed by actual implementation. "Music Hall," everybody agreed, had to be kept British. When the directive got to the programme producer's desk, however, it immediately became entangled in all sorts of reasonable, predictable difficulties. It is worth quoting the innocent, disarming ambiguity which the issue took up when analyzed in excessive detail. "It should be quite easy to build Music Hall programmes mainly all-British," the producer reassured. It very much depended on what was meant by it, though. "I think it would be difficult to make a hard and fast rule," which was exactly what the Controller of Programmes had been trying to do, "because a great many American acts are practically domiciled in England," therefore it would be hard to define strictly their broadcasting nationality, "and are established music hall favourites." To speak the truth, he added "of course it will be slightly more difficult to make a hard and fast rule, now that I am going to produce them once a week, when it comes to the bigger names, but I would always discuss the principle with you, if it was found necessary to put more than one American act into a particular bill." (527) These were the difficulties not only of maintaining a certain degree of Britishness, but before that of ascertaining what that policy could mean.

Five months later, Graves declared himself far from satisfied and he reiterated his worries almost in an identical form: "You will remember, will you not - and see that all concerned do too - what I have said about American forms," he warned Maschwitz's Assistant. "If a programme is definitely American in type that is all right, but I want the Variety Department to get away from the tendency to use American methods and phraseology in shows which are not American." He then stated explicitly this policy's final aim: "There is a real
job to be done, and one which should be tackled by the B.B.C. in reviving - or
creating, rather - a truly British type of light entertainment." (528)

Graves was indeed re-drawing the main lines of the more mature, more
durable "nationalist" policy of the B.B.C. If a rationale can be found in the
inextricable labyrinth of cultural influences and cultural protectionisms which
characterizes the history of Anglo-American broadcasting, here was the truest,
most elaborate version produced by the great British Corporation. The first
principle was that cultural borders were not and could not possibly be
insurmountable frontiers. There were internal pressures against such a policy,
professional broadcasters who said that a measure of openness could do some
good even to the sophisticated, educated, socially concerned British
broadcasting service (offering the listeners new brands of entertainment,
unheard voices, unusual styles). Furthermore, the setting up of effective
defences against the free flow of intellectual products was politically
untenable. The acceptance of a limited, hyper-controlled competition however
did not solve the problem. The next issue to be dealt with was how far could
this go without irremediably hurting the contours of the national identity and
traditions - those which, the Listener had proclaimed, were the standards by
which the B.B.C. performance could only be judged. Movie theatres were already
small fragments of the United States transported into Britain, the B.B.C.
thought. British broadcasting could not be swept away as British cinema had
been. British art and culture had to survive, as least artificially as
possible. This was the second line of action consistently pursued by the B.B.C.
all through the Thirties, a more sophisticated but direct descendant of the
early anti-Americanism of its comments.

This quasi-liberal attitude towards the liberalizing and popularizing
aspects of broadcasting, accompanied by a long standing preoccupation with the
national habits and culture extended well beyond Broadcasting House. It formed
part of a broad, crucially important, confused debate on the destinies of
culture in mass societies; it implied a political strategy of consent and therefore engaged minds and energies of politicians, journalists, publicists no less than of broadcasters. In August 1934 the Times issued a "Broadcasting number" which has often been cited as the outstanding, final proof of the established status of the B.B.C. (529). It debated institutional and technical aspects of broadcasting; it exalted the role of the new medium in the promotion of a better understanding among countries; but it also had something dignified to say on the search for new entertaining material. The worrying title of the article devoted to British entertainment was "Search for Talent. Lack of New Material." Its author's sympathies went with the B.B.C., "a non-commercial semi-public organization" which, having to compete with "vast commercial concerns with almost unlimited money to spend" could "offer neither high rewards nor regular employment." Almost with a social worker's attitude he endeavoured to explain how to defend the less well-to-do against such an unfair competition. Poverty, he argued, cannot be left to its fate. To be able to work efficiently it had to be protected against dangerous, artificial influences which prevented it from making the most of its own conditions. The lack of entertaining material, the article went on, was "due to the invasion of British entertainment by American music, American humour, and American 'quickfire' methods" ("and to the spread of popular education" it cryptically added). The problem was bigger than radio programmes but the expansion and progressive popularisation of broadcasting seemed to catalyze it in the 1930s. "Like syncopated dance music, Hollywood humour and Hollywood drama are foreign to the British temperament, but the fact remains that they are in fashion, and we are not likely to be able to beat the Americans at their own game." A conscious effort had therefore to be carried through and policies devised which would resist the invasion. "Until we return to a native art we are unlikely to have native artists. Thirty years ago the entertainment tradition in English-speaking countries was British," he warned, "to-day it is American." (530)
What was the Times talking about? - one might have wondered even then. In the confused transactions which were taking place it did not always seem very easy to ascertain what had come from each side of the frontier. Besides, if individual elements were undoubtedly long-standing, certified fragments of a British tradition, or a native art, what did they amount to? To what extent did they represent a more general phenomenon? According to the Listener, in the 1930s the B.B.C. still had a few clear ideas on the subject. What happened to those convictions in the 1940s and early 1950s, when sound broadcasting entered its most mature phase (to gradually give way to television)? The question would then become whether those attributes of an anthropological Britishness outlived the American deluge of World War 2.
In December 1950 R. A. Rendall presented the B.B.C. with a long report on its programmes, the result of three months of intensive listening to the Corporation's domestic services (which comprised by then the established Home Service, the more popular Light Programme, and the minority Third Programme). Asked to give his impressions on whether there had "been a decline in standards of taste in our programmes since the war?" - yes, he stated, there has been a marked decline exemplified by the fact that "the whole ethos of our programmes ... compared unfavourably with their pre-war equivalents and also with the Corporation's own declared intentions." To illustrate his argument he described a number of unwelcome changes: the impression given by the announcer who "now appears to be conscious of a primary duty to 'sell' to listeners the programmes he is announcing;" the development of radio personality which is seen as having "unbalancing effects on the Corporation's output," the fall in audience for straight talk, or the "tendency to promote the facetious at the expense of the serious-minded" - to mention only the most articulate of his broad denunciations. All in all, he concluded, it would be hard to deny that "a flight from distinction" has taken place during the war, a development which he thought detrimental to good broadcasting and contrary to the natural inclinations of the Corporation.

As for the causes which accounted for all this, Rendall had little doubt. "In large part," he wrote, "this is due to increased technical complication such as the introduction of recording, continuity suites etc., but I think it is also due to the impact on domestic broadcasting of the way in which overseas broadcasting in English to the United States and the Dominions developed during the war." The very fact of having had to compete stiffly in North America, he explains, changed established B.B.C. practice for the worse. "When the first three Controllers of the Light Programme were all taken from the wartime
Overseas Services the invasion of domestic broadcasting by Overseas presentation standards was complete." But there were other sources of external influences. "Similarly, the wartime use in domestic broadcasting of recordings of American variety hastened a process of Americanisation which the U.S. domination of the entertainment industry and the prolonged presence of American troops were in any case making inevitable."

"There can be no doubt," Rendall categorically concluded, "that Americanisation has involved a lowering of standards of taste." (531) Indeed he was making a very long story too short. It had all started in the late 1930s, then, since September 1939, the war precipitated the changes. What the role was played by U.S. broadcasting in this process is however harder to assess than Rendall seems to acknowledge.

5.1 - The B.B.C. at War: Domestic and International Dimensions of Growth

In 1939, Maurice Gorham wrote, "the war saved the B.B.C. from itself."(532) Perhaps changes were not as dramatic and radical as that, when seen in a longer perspective but it remains true that since September 1939 that aura of aloofness which had surrounded Broadcasting House in the 1930s was pulverized almost overnight and the B.B.C. found itself abruptly immersed in society. The break-up of the war had indeed immediate, very visible consequences on the daily existence of radio. Initially concentrated on the effort to go on broadcasting during air-raids, in the first year of fighting the B.B.C. limited its transmissions to one programme broadcast on two medium wavelengths(533) - which substituted the National and Regional programmes till then offering listening alternatives.

This did not mean that the B.B.C. reduced its presence in British society, however. In fact, the opposite is true. The broadcast day was extended (the programmes began at 7 a.m instead of 10.15 and went on to 12.15 a.m.) in order to meet the new needs radio programmes had to satisfy in national emergencies. Then, after the first month of news bulletins and pre-recorded programmes, a
feverish activity was started to cope with the psychological strain of the phoney war in the effort to offer the best information and entertainment hard times could allow for. Working conditions, while hard (most departments had been dispersed and housed in the most precarious lodgings), were still acceptable. In October the most popular programmes were back on the air. Entertainment shows received new impulse. The dispatching of news from abroad was followed with particular attention, and greater care was put into making it come alive for the listener.

At the beginning of 1940 the expanding effects of the war were becoming more apparent. A special British Expeditionary Forces programme (which after Dunkirk became the Forces Programme transmitting from 6.30 a.m. to 11 p.m.) was then started to give listeners an alternative to the Home Service (as it was now called). And it had a completely new attitude. Unlike the National and the Regional Programmes, the two B.B.C. services represented "contrasting programmes, Home more serious, Forces more entertaining." (534) They were both aimed at a national audience and were not limited in conception and financial support as the regional programme had been before the war. Rather swiftly the audience to the Forces Programme began growing spectacularly and in 1942 it was half as great as that of the Home. In parallel, the habit of listening was also spreading beyond pre-war boundaries. Gradually during the war the B.B.C. rose to the role of an unquestionable, firmly established institution. Its influence upon society at large was greatly increased, its credibility enormously enhanced with almost all classes of people.

This process of qualitative and quantitative expansion was not limited to the national territories of the United Kingdom. International activities both to and from Britain were expanded almost beyond reasonable belief. Keeping up with a tendency which had been growing since the late 1930s, "new foreign language services were launched in bewildering profusion" (535) while exchanges with allied (and some neutral) countries rose to a peak. Also the broadcasting link with the Commonwealth countries acquired a new importance. In 1940 the
North American Service was launched, a short-wave service specifically studied to appeal to Canadian and U.S. listeners. Relays from abroad were also multiplied, in the effort to obtain fresher news. Meanwhile, before the introduction of the Forces Programme, when many listeners would be "roaming the ether in search of alternatives" to the B.B.C. Home Service, the Radio Times began printing foreign programmes "excluding those of Germany and her satellites, ... under the heading of 'Alternative Programmes.'" (536)

It was just the beginning. If not all the changes had come to stay, a general move towards a further expansion of broadcasting across frontiers seemed to be firmly under way. Much more clearly than before the war, cross-cultural exchanges came as a result of two main lines of pressure. The first one coincided with an internal demand, as one might call it, derived from the inherent necessities of good broadcasting at home (implying an ever increasing need for new, fresh material). Indeed, insofar as internal developments are concerned, if political considerations and direct political control were obviously stronger than ever, (537) in the depths of the B.B.C. the drive towards independence and professionalism was also gaining momentum. Propaganda is undoubtedly one key to understand what was happening to broadcasting during the war but changes due to intrinsic expansion and to the search for effective vehicles of entertainment and information should not be overlooked. (538) The decision to send radio correspondents to the front line for instance belongs not only, nor mainly, to the official history of propaganda; it also crucially influenced the subsequent evolution of broadcasting. As for the second pressure, the external one, resulting from what was happening outside broadcasting, it could be described as an offer creating its own demand: the very intensification of international contacts brought with it ideas, approaches, material which had been conceived, elaborated, produced in foreign countries. Especially in the United States.
A certain, intrinsic curiosity, an urge to change established practices found fruitful ground in a political situation which encouraged exchanges between Britain and the United States.

5.2 - The Birth of Anglo-American Broadcasting, 1940-43

The outbreak of the war did not alter significantly the size and social composition of the highly selected audience which would regularly tune into U.S. stations transmitting on short waves to Britain. (539) As had happened in the 1930s, American programmes got to the average British listener through other, more established channels. Obviously, when the United States entered the war in December 1941 exchanges between the broadcasting services of the two countries increased rather abruptly. But even before that the B.B.C. was frantically multiplying its contacts with the American networks. The urgent necessity to build up reliable channels of communication was Gerald Cock's main worry when he took over the job of North American Representative after Greene's resignation, in April 1941. Political considerations were indeed strong enough to his mind to force him to abandon for the time being the fears he had expressed in 1929 in his report against the Americanization of the entertainment industry. (540) Twelve years later the principal matter was to encourage trans-Atlantic communication and promote exchanges and cultural infiltrations without investigating further the possible consequences. (541) This was to be the B.B.C. strategy in North America as dictated by political priorities.

In May, Lindsay Wellington, B.B.C. Acting Controller working in liaison with the Ministry of Information, was asked by the Government (542) to pay a visit to the United States. (543) His mission is numbered amongst the most crucial events in the political history of Anglo-American broadcasting during the war. Through Wellington's voice the British spoke out clearly and explained their vision of a possible co-operation between the two countries. Strategies of both domestic and international broadcasting were to be considered in the
new terms of the proposed alliance. Wellington was thus asked to sound out American feelings about a joint propaganda effort which would have entailed, on one side, the promotion of a mutual understanding between British and American listeners in the home programmes and, on the other, the projection of the Anglo-American alliance as a model of democracy to other countries.

It was a proposal of the greatest consequence to the ensuing history of broadcasting at least for two essential reasons. First of all, insofar as it implied the promotion in Britain of a greater familiarity with things American it also entailed the elimination of the main controls set up before the war to defend British broadcasting from the dangers of Americanization. In more than one sense, His Majesty's Government was in fact urging the creation of new openings in the broadcasting frontiers between Britain and the United States. Secondly, the very idea of pursuing a joint propaganda effort, if it resulted often in declarations of incompetence on and from both sides, also multiplied personal contacts and implied comparison of techniques and approaches.

Indeed, by 1941, things had changed greatly in Broadcasting House - and "not so much through Reith's going, as through the coming of war." The launching of the North American Service in 1940 to better satisfy the needs of war is an interesting example of the devious ways in which political developments could have a crucial influence upon the promotion of what Rendall would define as the Americanization of the B.B.C., a phenomenon which seemed to have nothing to do with the war. The very idea of transmitting directly and specifically to the North American public introduced spurious elements in the orderly minds of the B.B.C. officials. To the point that it could even be maintained that the establishment of the N.A.S. had much more momentous consequences on the history of British broadcasting than on the history of Anglo-American diplomatic relations - no matter what the original intentions had been in Britain and what the British Government thought it was being asked
to finance. Indeed it was at least a matter of dimension. While in the United states the N.A.S. played a very limited and specialized role (its American audience was very limited, especially when compared with the networks' audiences), (547) in Britain it exercised a decisive influence on B.B.C. strategies and attitudes.

What made the North American strategies so energetic and pervasive was that on American ground the B.B.C. had to face a most powerful competition. (548) For once, the monopolistic Corporation had to struggle fiercely for an audience. Confronted with such an unusual task it proved more flexible than expected and capable of adapting itself to needs and habits of listening which it had always considered at least foreign, if not utterly despicable. Behind these changes there were also new characters. During the war the B.B.C. had to increase enormously its personnel. This brought to its disposal new faces and fresher brains. Many of them were employed in the External Services and many in the North American Service. In fact, "nearly all" the people who formed the N.A.S. staff "would never have thought of coming to the B.B.C. but for the war," the first N.A.S. Director wrote. "They brought with them not only expert knowledge [Denis Brogan, for instance, was the N.A.S. Intelligence expert] but a new outlook and a new attitude." (549)

The Ministry of Information itself had recommended the B.B.C. to get rid of its supercilious convictions, forget about its standards and be prepared to adopt voices, styles and techniques considered more suitable to appeal to American listeners for its new service. A "Note on Broadcasting" issued by the American Department of the Ministry in December 1939 explicitly asked the B.B.C. to free itself from its own restrictions. It suggested, for instance, that "the American radio technique of building up a few special radio personalities be followed rather than the British one of discouraging the development of 'stars.'" Given the strenuous resistance opposed by the Corporation to the appearance of too popular artists who might think of using their power over the public to hold their employers to ransom, it was a daring
proposal. But there was more. In that same note, the Ministry pleased itself with declaring it "desirable" that a Canadian announcer should be employed "with an accent and radio technique calculated to appeal to North American listeners." Then, the document went on, "where possible ordinary British men and women, not professional broadcasters, and not either politicians or academic experts, be given prominence ... since a more immediate human contact is established between the London taxi-driver or docker or housewife, and a mid-western family sitting around its farm house radio, than can ever be established between an upper class, educated Englishman and the ordinary American." (550)

The message was clear: perhaps too clear to please the B.B.C. whose immediate reaction was rather negative, perhaps lest the government would ask it to launch new enterprises without adequately financing the project. "Suggestions of special features are not at present practicable, since," the B.B.C. tautologically explained, "the Overseas programmes consist, apart from news and talks, of recordings from the Home Service Programme." As an obvious consequence, "the planning of entertainment programmes primarily for American, Canadian, or any other overseas audience, is ... quite impossible." (551)

Eventually, however, the Ministry's suggestions got through and the B.B.C. could not any more avoid confrontation with the problem of the Americanization of its North American programmes. From the moment the Corporation officially endeavoured to set up the North American Service those challenging proposals were filtered and ultimately decided upon by the B.B.C. itself.

But the new trends set in motion by the establishment of the N.A.S. did not all work in the same direction. As had often happened when the broadcasters of the two countries had met in reality a double process was started, the second part of which had multiple effects. On one hand, in answer to the obsessive effort to define what an American listener was and therefore what he might want to hear, a gigantic intelligence apparatus was set up. Its main assumption was that since Americans were a strange people who listened to
strange radio programmes their habits and tastes would have to be carefully studied and analysed. This approach implied the maintenance of a feeling of cultural diversity; what the B.B.C. did in or for the United States had nothing to do with what the Corporation did for its home listeners. It would not alter its nature nor its naturally British standards. "We should not be afraid of displaying emotion," the Director of the Empire Service once told the N.A.S. staff. "The most successful broadcast from London since the outbreak of the war was N.B.C.'s two-way conversation between British parents and evacuated children. The remarkable effect of this broadcast should remind us that the Americans are a sentimental people, and that we should do well to appeal to those sentiments." (552) B.B.C. producers engaged in domestic programmes did not seem to have much to learn from these techniques as they were built upon what were considered as fundamental differences between the two peoples.

Nevertheless there was always another side to the N.A.S. activities which other B.B.C. officials repeatedly stressed. Not all but many of the programmes conceived for a North American audience, the styles adopted, the attitudes followed, might also have served home listeners well. The very remark about the introduction of a more emotional tone could be interpreted in such a way as to teach British broadcasters something. "The British habit of understatement," for instance, coupled with the average 'cultured' English voice, "made things very hard" for the N.A.S. staff, as Gorham recalled. "We would get hold of some Commando or paratrooper with a most desperate record, meet him in the studio, finding an enormous athlete with a face like Victor McLaglen - and then over the microphone would come 'Oh, it was nothing much really', in a little piping voice." (553) If this could not work in America, it was becoming increasingly unsuitable to the political and emotional circumstances, to the very development of broadcasting also within the British Isles.

Briggs was the first to acknowledge that the very fact of being forced to think about how to allure the American listener implied an exposure to methods and styles which were unheard of, and sometimes despised, in Britain. Indeed,
of the four changes which he saw as characterizing the development of the B.B.C. during the war, two were strictly related to policies first introduced in the North American Service - combined with internal drives which were probably heading in the same direction. Attitudes towards news, for instance, changed radically, both in the Overseas and the North American Services, and in home broadcasting. "During the 1920s and 1930s," Briggs recounts, "the B.B.C.'s News services had been authoritative but very restricted in scope and very cautious in tone, and tremendous care had been taken, above all else, not to be drawn into competition with the Press." (554)

An episode quoted from Gorham's autobiography evokes that atmosphere and illustrates how the divergence between the British and American approach to news and news comments was still wide at the beginning of the war. Gorham recounts how he met John Gunther, U.S. war correspondent, in London and how good a broadcaster he was. "But when I tried to arrange for him to give a short talk after the news, I found things very embarrassing. I told him that they would like to give a 'news talk' and he said 'Fine. What night?' I had to explain that they were not certain what night they would use but he could record it at any time before he went back. He said 'But how can I give a news talk without knowing what's in the news?' and I could only say that the B.B.C.'s news talks often sounded like that." (555) Being aware of the difficulties and flaws of the system, Gorham could not help feeling remorseful for it.

The Radio Pictorial's version of the B.B.C. pre-war style in broadcast news, as compared to the American system, was much more ironical. "In ten minutes, the American announcers gave all and more than the B.B.C. boys could ever manage in 30 minutes. They spoke swiftly, dramatically, but without the gravity and alarm that unfailingly comes over the air when every word is weighed and pondered. They didn't skip the crime or scandal; they prefaced each announcement with the name of the city of its origin." (556) This sounded like
a world apart, where quickness, professionalism, sharp information was all that mattered.

On the other side of the ocean, the B.B.C. of the late 1930s seemed too remote, too worried, too self-conscious. Greene, the 1930s North American Representative, had on some occasions deplored that too stiff attitude. He could see the reactions it prompted abroad. "There are occasions in which ... we fail lamentably to provide our Empire listeners with an adequate service," he had written in one of his pre-war reports and his remarks on the matter are interesting as they applied also to the B.B.C. domestic information policy: "They are the occasions in which some serious international crisis occurs in Europe. Let me take as an example the recent Austrian crisis. An historic event of immeasurable importance and pregnant with incalculable possibilities unfolded itself in a series of critical developments ... Across the entire world hour by hour reports were being anxiously read in newspapers of every language. What influence did this tremendous event have upon our own service to the peoples of the Empire? Almost none whatever. With people throughout our Dominions and Colonies turning to the B.B.C. for authoritative interpretation of events, we continued - apart of course from our news periods - for all the world as if nothing had happened." At the same time, the U.S. networks were sending their first correspondents abroad to be able to give American listeners at home the real sound, the witnesses' voices of the dramatic moment. (557)

Indeed the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Greene reported, had asked for the B.B.C. cooperation, got nothing and therefore took the commentaries broadcast from Europe by the American companies. Greene's resentful comments went on: "While American companies gave their listeners talks from Vienna and London, Paris and Prague, Berlin and Rome, many by able and distinguished speakers, we gave our Empire listeners virtually nothing beyond the accounts in our regular news periods. On March 14th at the time when America (and Canada) was listening to an account of Hitler's arrival in Vienna, we were presenting to our listeners in the Empire 'Stars of the Cabinet World.' When, later,
American listeners heard a very informative and dispassionate account of the day's momentous events from Berlin, our transmitters were sending to the ends of the earth 'Old Folks at Home - a Series of Popular Melodies.'" (558)

Similar critical remarks recurred often in the correspondence from the New York Office whose staff did not hesitate to compare explicitly the B.B.C.'s disappointing performances with the energetic exploits of the American correspondents. Broadcasting House's standard reaction to those attacks was a stubborn defence of the Corporation's own peculiarities. In reply to one of those unfavourable comments, Miss Benzie, B.B.C. Foreign Director before the war, stated, for instance: "The main difference between us and the Americans is, I think, that we do very seldom proceed without a fair guarantee of quality, while they apparently often do ... and some American efforts look to us so suspiciously like stunts or items put in for their value in the press rather than their value in the programmes." (559) Indeed, the B.B.C. had purposefully built up its own resistances against an excessive indulgence towards the attractiveness of fresh, sensational news. So when, in 1937, Stuart King Hall, a B.B.C. commentator, proposed, on the pages of the Radio Times that foreign correspondents should have been employed and that news should be discovered and reported with far greater boldness, John Coatman, the B.B.C. News Director, had a whole philosophy to retort. "The B.B.C. in this matter of news broadcasting sets before itself the useful but nevertheless limited ideal of giving the public a sober and accurate summary of the news which it receives from the four news agencies ... If we were to act on his [King Hall's] suggestion, there would be not only the likelihood but the virtual certainty of the B.B.C.'s news services degenerating into a mixture of sensationalism and ex parte reporting." (560)

Yet in a couple of years things began to change. Since September 3, 1939, not only news bulletins grew dramatically in importance (as could very well have been expected) and were given peak hours. Swiftly, the very approach to news and information underwent a fundamental transformation. If political
control on news and talks was stricter than ever, and caution had become a national duty, "there was a remarkable development in news techniques both in the domestic and even more in the overseas news service of the B.B.C." All in all, these changes resulted from "an enhanced sense of professionalism." (561) "The war revolutionised news broadcasting," the Corporation itself would have declared to the Beveridge Committee in 1949. "It led to the development, not only of a multiplicity of bulletins to meet the needs for war news, but also of new forms of programmes. The news magazine, containing interviews with people in the news, short news talks and recorded extracts from speeches won a world popularity under the title Radio Newsreel. Confined until comparatively recently to overseas broadcasting, it was introduced in 1947 into the Light Programme, with conspicuous success." (562) There was an American model behind all this. Its most powerful personification was Ed Murrow, the well known American radio journalist who was popular in Britain since the 1930s. (563) Its most active training grounds were, without doubt, the news and talks departments of the N.A.S.

Indeed, even before the official opening transmission of the North American Service, in those programmes which were known as being closely followed by a North American audience, "news bulletins were shortened, news commentaries on the American model were introduced, special programme features were built up ... and the general style of announcing was radically changed." (564) That news bulletins and news commentaries would have to be given special attention was thereafter repeatedly stressed by all the B.B.C. officials who had something to do with the N.A.S. In January 1941 R. A. Rendall, then Director of the B.B.C. Empire Service, saw the development of the North American Service as having reached a critical stage. "Our policy of specialization has justified itself," he congratulated his staff. Then, as a further exhortation he added: "The greatest need is for speed of news and for authoritative comment on news. In the past we have been nervous about interrupting the programmes to put out 'news flashes' because it seemed to give
undue significance to the news items themselves; this is a misconception in
relation to the North American audience and I therefore think that we should
more often put out 'news flashes.'" (565) "Speed of news" was considered
necessary in the political circumstances. It meant shorter programmes, a quick
reaction to events and a "greater emotional voltage." "The people of the U.S.A.
and Canada expect that the intense interest they take in events here shall be
satisfied, and satisfied quickly," a report on short-wave transmissions to
American stated in July 1941. "The public expect feature programmes, talks and
music to come to them with a quicker sense of timing and to be produced in a
more vital manner than we normally expect here. They are inclined to regard our
broadcasting in comparison as lackadaisical and rather anaemic." (566)

Undoubtedly in the United States broadcasting the main conveyor of an
endless vitality was the lack of intervals between or within programmes. An
established feature of American radio since its very early days, the
'continuity system,' as it was called, had accustomed North American listeners
to precise timing and quick succession of items. The slow arrangements and long
intervals of the B.B.C. would have been unacceptable to them. Until the war,
the principle that time restrictions could become an essential part of the
programmes conception had not been very popular within the B.B.C. Its
management feared that an excessive attention to timing could fatally flaw the
quality of the productions and therefore ultimately preferred those "periods of
silence" (567) which so typically characterized the phlegmatic, stiff approach
of the British Corporation in the 1920s and 1930s. The introduction of the
'continuity system' is the second of the changes which Briggs illustrates as
having taken place during the war. Indeed, in this instance, he too maintains
that this technique was extended to the B.B.C. domestic programmes from the
North American Service: "The pre-war practice of the B.B.C.," he explains, "had
been to allow over—runs and pauses between programmes, a practice that did not
commend itself to the American networks and commercial stations that relayed
many programmes from the B.B.C.'s North American Service ... For them, time was money and exact timing had to be kept." (568)

But there was also another "American" influence which must have played a part in the gradual transformation of the B.B.C. style. Apart from U.S. broadcasting itself, the commercial radio stations which broadcast from the Continent before the war also provided a possible "American" model. Major Longland, B.B.C. Liaison Officer with the British Expeditionary Force, evoked their experience instead of the U.S. networks' performances to argue in favour of the continuity system. "I have been trying for some time to find out the exact point of attraction in these programmes as compared with our present ones, and after a good deal of argument and thought I think that I have discovered it. The commercial programmes were ... presented very much as a whole ... I am convinced that it was this note of continuity, and the sense of participation between broadcaster and listener, given by the voice of the compere, which contributed in a large degree to the popularity of these programmes." (569)

Soon intervals were completely eliminated from the N.A.S. and gradually disappeared from the domestic programmes as well. The "American" influence of the N.A.S. over the home programmes was not always so linearly and almost unanimously accepted, though. The history of another early invention of the N.A.S. staff, the first "soap opera" ever broadcast by the B.B.C., "Front Line Family" was much more controversial as the format encountered violent resistance before being transplanted to the Light Programme after the war. It was, once more, a belated innovation on the part of the North American B.B.C. (570) Daily serials had become popular in the United States a decade earlier and in the 1940s were already an established feature in most stations' programmes. Script writing had grown to the size and organization of a successful industry. (571) Meanwhile in Britain they were hardly considered suitable material to be broadcast. A few serial plays had been produced towards the end of the 1930s. But still in 1939 the B.B.C. Handbook presented them as
some kind of a strange novelty: "An interesting aspect of the year's radio
dramatic work was the development of serial plays. The serial feature, which is
the backbone of American radio, had made comparatively few appearances before
1938." (572) Besides, the pre-war productions of the B.B.C. were not
specifically conceived for daytime listeners and they did not usually possess
the "family appeal" which characterized most American soap operas.

"Front Line Family" was the first attempt at a more Americanized type of
serial. Indeed Gorham himself wanted to identify the programme as a production
which could be assimilated to an American original. "Front Line Family," he
wrote, "was what would be called a soap opera in America and Australia where
this type of family serial is enormously popular." (573) Also the Radio Times
stressed the "American" character of the enterprise: "This new serial," it
announced, "written by Alan Melville, ... should find a ready audience
overseas, particularly in America, where these daily serials often run for
years." (574) But there was a difference, Gorham added. "There was no need to
invent complications to keep the audience interested; it merely told the story
of an ordinary British family during the war, and in so doing it brought home
the realities of black-out, rationing, National Service and bombing to our
distant listeners better than either news or talk could do." (575) Indeed, the
very fact of war, the emotional interest it aroused, the continuous
interruptions to what could have become realistic descriptions of daily routine
originally launched and later saved the programme in spite of the lack of
experience in serial writing of the British producers. (576)

However, apart from the fixed-time format ("Front Line Family" was
broadcast from Monday to Friday at the same time) and the idea of reproducing
the domestic life of a limited group of people (whose life and emotions should
have become familiar almost to the point of friendship), it would be hard to
say what was American about this B.B.C. serial. Gorham thought he had it pretty
clear. The N.A.S. slogan, he wrote in his memoirs, was "'British in content,
American in appeal.'" (577) The same idea, it could be inferred, was applied to
"Front Line Family." Yet, if compared with an American supposed equivalent, the British programme not only sounded more pedantic; it was totally wrapped in a conception of entertainment which had very little to do with the original American inspiration. (578)

The question of the degree of "Americanness" of "Front Line Family" seems even more legitimate when one looks at what happened to U.S. broadcasting (and to soap operas in particular) after Pearl Harbor. One might have ascribed the peculiarity of the newly introduced British soap opera to the unique circumstances in which it was conceived, Britain being a country at war when the B.B.C. first decided to produce "Front Line Family." This explanation however is not utterly satisfying. In the United States the national emergency highlighted (in another way and to a lesser degree what was happening in Britain) the inherent difficulties which commercial companies might have in coming to terms with the Government's needs and directives. Given the scope of broadcasting, then, given its foremost commercial priorities, no genre, no format could easily be reduced to a linear development in the United States, not even during the war. Soap operas were no exception. They had nothing of the educative, monolithic steadiness of "Front Line Family." While the British production was aimed at showing "the rest of the world the human side of Britain's crisis" and pursued that aim with the heaviest tone which had to accompany an act of patriotism and the most didactic of attitudes, in America "only a few serials attempted to concern themselves deeply with the war and, with even fewer exceptions, those which did so were not successful in attracting audiences sufficiently large or responsive to remain on the air." (579)

There was a difference in conception then which made for the diverging reverberations which the war had on this particular kind of radio production on either side of the Atlantic. But there was also a difference in actual techniques, as the complete story of "Front Line Family" demonstrates. To begin with, in the first year of programming the serial had been written and produced
by Melville alone, perhaps a unique case in the history of soap operas (580)
which indeed would have astonished any broadcaster familiar with U.S. radio.
When in October 1941, at the time of Melville's first creativity crisis, an
American radio scriptwriter living in England, Mrs. Colley, was asked to
prepare a critical analysis of "Front Line Family" she pointed out the lack of
a human element in its characters and the vagueness of their individual traits.
Besides, she was struck by the stiffness of the dialogues, from which any
colloquialism had been eliminated. All this was bad enough but what ultimately
killed the series' entertainment value, according to the American critic, was
that there was no main character. This was unacceptable by American standards
and ran against techniques "that has been evolved through 13 years of intense
competition in successful strip show production among American, Canadian and
Australian advertising agencies," as Mrs. Colley protested. "The standard for
serial writing is already set," she concluded. "Why give your audience less
than they expect in good entertainment?" (581)

Nevertheless, with all its technical primitiveness, with all its gravity
and pedantic didacticism, "Front Line Family" enjoyed a remarkable popularity
in the United States and in the rest of the English speaking world. (582) "By
May 1942 it was reported that "'Front Line Family seems to have created more
general interest than any programme other than the news, the talks by Priestley
and Wickham Steed and possibly Newsreel.'" (583) That interest, it was added,
tended to increase. (584) It was in the intrinsic functioning of the medium
that such a success would work in favour of the existing style, dialogues and
techniques. The listeners' response legitimated the British approach and
discarded as spurious the American remarks. Indeed it was the U.S. adviser to
the Empire Service who ultimately intervened in defence of the peculiarly
British flavour of the programme. Ted Church had arrived from the United States
at the beginning of 1942 to help set up the B.B.C. North American Service.
(585) He had rather clear ideas about what had to be copied from the United
States and what should be left out. "There are two or three things at which the
base used for selling soap and the base we are using to sell Great Britain meet, but there are also several points at which these bases separate and quit justifiably so." (586) This was far from surprising. It was Church again who commented in a report on his activities in England exclaimed: "I used to smile at suggestions that I was 'Americanizing' your services ... as though one Yank could possibly remove the 'Made in Britain' stamp now on it." (587) The series than remained on the air and preserved almost intact its original characteristics. (588)

What was also remarkable about "Front Line Family" was the influence it exercised on post-war broadcasting. In 1945 the serial was brought into the new Light Programme, under the title of "The English Family Robinson" and "it proved just as popular here. It was the forerunner of two other daily serials, Dick Barton and Mrs. Dale's Diary, both of which have become household words and attained the notoriety of mentions in Parliament and the Courts." (589) There were those (Gielgud in particular) who deprecated its "Americanness" but most B.B.C. officials thought it was worth testing the reactions of the home listeners. Indeed, in three months listening grew from the 3.6% of the first episodes to 6.8% in November 1945: data which compared honorably with the American soap operas' ratings. (590) So it was that in April 1946 "The Family Robinson" - "radio's longest run daily serial" (591) - celebrated its fifth anniversary. Most people at the B.B.C. thought it could not be taken off the air without giving a substitute. Soap operas had entered British broadcasting for good. As Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, the Labourite Chairman of the B.B.C. between 1947 and 1952, would write in the early 1950s, "some members of the Drama Department detest the daily serials which they regard as thoroughly bad ... But Mrs. Dale is loved by the millions, and the Editor of the Light Programme rightly, and indeed inevitably, insists on it." (592) What remained controversial was to what extent the soap operas produced by the B.B.C. still resembled their American models.
If the North American Service can indeed be viewed as an almost unconscious multiplier of American influence (593) it was not the only device through which immediate political developments came imperceptibly to play a significant role in the promotion of the Americanization of the B.B.C. during the war. Indeed attention to the United States involved a much greater effort than simply studying the best propaganda methods towards North America. At home, interest in what the United States was doing and would do was crucial not only in terms of war alliances. In December 1940 R. A. Rendall, then Director of the Empire Service, reported from a visit in the United States: "The war has changed the function of our New York office. Instead of being concerned primarily with the supply of programme material for use in Home programmes it is now mainly occupied with publicity and other activities in connection with our short-wave programmes." An "unfortunate result of this change of emphasis," he added, "has been that N.A.R. has not been able to put forward suggestions for increased U.S. material in the Home programmes. I think this is particularly unfortunate because there is a real need at present for more information about the United States." (594)

As America increasingly came to represent the only hope, (595) curiosity towards what was happening on the other side of the Ocean could only increase. And the role played by broadcasting as an agent of communication was becoming every day more crucial. "In 1941, the cessation of air raids and the German attack on Russia," Gorham recalled, "left Britain still blockaded and radio was almost the only way of breaking the blockade and communicating regularly with the free world of America and the remnants of freedom in Europe." (596) In the same year a Committee to Explain the United States in Britain was set up among various state departments; (597) two B.B.C. officials were asked to be in the Committee: George Barnes, Assistant Director of Talks, and Laurence Gilliam, Head of Features. In September, Gilliam was then directly urged to start thinking about the production of feature programmes "to portray America's way of living, her traditions, history, culture, and so on." (598)
A Mass Observation "Report on Opinion on America," published in March 1942, testifies to the interest the British government was taking in the diffusion of a favourable vision of the ally. The survey was "based on a continuous sampling of opinion and collection of supporting material since the outbreak of war, plus an intensive investigation in the London area in the latter part of January and early February 1942." It assessed rather positively what the influence of broadcasting could be on the image of the United States in England. "The majority of people," the document stated, "get their ideas about America and Americans from what they read in newspapers and magazines, but substantial minorities derive their ideas and opinions also from the radio and from personal experience ... Contrary to a very common belief comparatively very few people (and mostly women) get their main ideas about America direct from the cinema." (599) On the other hand, the B.B.C. Listener Research staff discovered in July 1941 that the Corporation's "American Commentary" was an "important factor in creating informed public opinion about the United States and that its influence is not confined to a small circle of serious minded listeners." (600) Six months later a second survey specified that indeed Swing was regarded as "the voice of America" and that "his popularity rests on familiarity, appreciation of his knowledge and balanced judgements, and his congenial broadcasting manner." (601) The message was clear and the findings interesting. The B.B.C., the Ministry of Information and probably the War Office set out to exploit those perceptions of the reliability of radio as comprehensively as possible. (602) Here was a medium of mass communication which was thought to portray "reality" as well as to entertain, as the Mass Observation report seems to imply. That being so, the B.B.C. could indeed oppose its power of persuasion to an unchecked interference of the political world.

At the beginning of 1942 the broadcasting Corporation established its own Interdivisional Committee on Use of Radio in Anglo-American and Imperial Relations. (603) By then the B.B.C. had decided to take the whole matter into
its own hands (insofar as this proved possible in war circumstances) and to translate vague strategies and generic pleas into programmes and broadcasting policies. It therefore set out to assess what had been done until then and to indicate what could still be done on the basis of past experiences. The first report of the Interdivisional Committee drew a rather complete picture of the extent to which the United States entered or influenced the B.B.C. output. Anglo-American broadcasting relations comprised exchanges in three directions: Westbound, from Britain to North America (the N.A.S., the distribution of B.B.C. transcriptions in the United States and the broadcast of special messages were the main Westbound activities); Eastbound, from the United States to Britain (as exemplified by the news supply, the "American commentaries", the programmes produced by the B.B.C. New York Office, the exchange programmes with the American networks) and then towards Europe and the world outside the Empire where co-operation in propaganda efforts was pursued.

To develop further the alliance in broadcasting the B.B.C. thought efforts had to be directed towards a stronger representation of Britain in America and of America in Britain. To increase its Westbound operations the B.B.C. would have to contemplate the possibility of accepting sponsorship for its programmes in the United States; (604) to refine and enrich the image of America which it could convey to its listeners at home, the strategy was to be "programme infiltration." (605) Then, if in the first year of war the "American men" of the B.B.C. had been mainly concerned with the effort to project Britain in the United States, (606) increasingly since 1941-42 they were asked to take care of the image of America and Americans in Britain. By the beginning of 1943 the activities of the B.B.C. in the United States involved so many different operations towards so many different directions that the New York Office had to be reorganized so as to divide its staff between those who were in charge of Eastbound and Westbound Operations. (607)

5.3 - "Programme Infiltration"
In May 1942 James E. L. Langham, B.B.C. Assistant Director of Programme Planning, circulated a memo which eliminated any residual doubt regarding the requests which were presented to the B.B.C. in relation to this aspect of the war effort. "A Committee of which I am a member has recently been formed to examine various ways of using radio to further Anglo-American relations," he informed his colleagues at the B.B.C. "One method which we are asked to investigate and put into practice comes under the heading of 'programme infiltration' i.e. the introduction of short contributions from across the Atlantic in existing programmes." Variety producers were the first to be mobilized to implement the new strategy, Langham insisted. "In the course of programme building you may sometimes find it possible to allot a five, ten, or fifteen minute spot to be filled by an appropriate contribution from America." From then on, Langham implied, those five, ten or fifteen minutes were not to be wasted.

If variety material imported from the U.S. was always the most controversial part of the radio productions "infiltrated" in the B.B.C. output, however, given the general emphasis towards better information which permeated the Corporation's policy in the war years, it is far from surprising that the B.B.C. dedicated more and more of its output to features and news programmes (originating in the United States) openly aimed at giving a true picture of that country. "Listeners to the Home Service heard President Roosevelt's talks, Mr. Churchill's speeches to Congress, weekly commentaries by Raymond Gram Swing, Ernest K. Lindley, Alistair Cooke, and other commentators, and" after December 1941, "actuality programmes describing the American war effort. The B.B.C. 's own office in New York, which was fast expanding its activities, arranged for numerous items to be sent over for inclusion in B.B.C. home programmes ... Well-known Americans like Robert Sherwood, John Gunther, Alexander Woolcott, and Dorothy Thompson visited England and broadcast to listeners here as well as back home. There were exchange programmes and joint productions." Martin Codel, publisher of the well-known American magazine
Broadcasting, in a talk broadcast by the C.B.S. Home Service for the United States celebrated this state of affairs: "The B.B.C. people," he said, "have a wholesome respect for our broadcasting system and radio methods. They are constantly sending men to America on Radio missions ... B.B.C. maintains offices in New York, Washington and elsewhere in the U.S.A. and Canada to take advantage of what we have to offer. Some of the most popular B.B.C. programmes are rebroadcasts, usually via recordings, of some of our own favourites." (610)

What struck Codel was that at the time of his talk (September 1942) the B.B.C. still had not a news correspondent in the United States - and it would not have one until the end of the war, when Leonard Miall was sent to Washington. There were at least two immediate reasons for that. First of all, the Corporation's policy towards foreign correspondents was not as yet very clear. If one leaves out of consideration the decision to employ war correspondents, so clearly influenced by the exceptional circumstances, the idea to establish permanently news correspondents abroad who would be independent of the press agencies was still controversial. (611) In the second place, in the early 1940s Broadcasting House was still convinced that all informative material on America (a not insignificant share of the B.B.C. output) involved much more preparation, much more reinterpretation than the job of correspondent might imply. So if on one side the traditional policy of privileging comments over scoops was maintained, the effort of projecting "real America" to British listeners further advanced on the track opened by the North American Representative in the late 1930s.

However, if no direct correspondent in the most modern version existed this did not mean that the B.B.C. found itself in want of fresh material from the United States. For all sorts of reasons Broadcasting House was flooded with American stuff sent in by the New York office during the war. In the effort to provide the B.B.C. in London with as many American items as possible, the North American staff left aside its natural role of interpreter and filter between the two broadcasting services. The frantic rhythms imposed by the war seemed to
make null and void pre-war cautions. But the climate of cultural emergency did not last long. Even though it had been the B.B.C. itself which had asked for recordings of the best American programmes, complaints of the waste which this implied began to circulate in London very early. (612) Besides it was increasingly felt that an intervention was needed which would not only limit the quantity of recordings but also question their suitability to a British audience. In September 1942 W. M. Newton, B.B.C. Middle West Correspondent, added a significant footnote to the list of programme requirements for its department. His remarks upon the B.B.C. American suggestions resemble closely similar cries sent out before the war: "One general point worth making is that, with the exception of the American Variety Programs of the Jack Benny type, there appeared to be general agreement that for one reason or another (presentation, rate of speech, angling to audience, etc.) the program material we are able to 'lift' from American networks is hardly ever usable. In other words, the B.B.C.'s special program needs from U.S.A. will have to be handled, from start to finish, as a B.B.C. job." (613) Once again, the plea was not to overlook differences but build upon them, accept what one could get but learn to translate it.

Soon then, the effort of interpretation and reformulation was set as the highest priority. A particularly strong effort of translation to this extent was applied to the informative type of programme. It was in the early 1940s that the B.B.C. began to identify as a peculiarly national creature the radio feature programmes. Apart from the various occasional talks and the regular series of comments from America, these documentary productions constituted the bulk of the "serious" programmes concerning the United States. These American experiences strengthened the feeling of patriotic pride which accompanies most British comments on feature programmes. "The feature programme as such was purely a B.B.C. invention: no other radio service in America or anywhere else had developed it so effectively," D. G. Bridson maintains. (But he was clearly overlooking "a long forgotten strand in the development of mainstream American
broadcasting that explored the artistic potential of the medium of radio."

The "man in the street" participation to programmes, for instance, Bridson went on, was almost unknown in U.S. radio. Ed Murrow, the mythical C.B.S. correspondent, assured Bridson "that actuality programmes ... were something quite unknown in the States. Radio there was strictly for the professionals; if any misguided man in the street was inveigled into the studio, it was only to hear himself gonged and laughed off the air in some such sadistic show as Major Bowes' Amateur Hour." The conclusion seemed quite obvious.

In a 1942 report urging the production of feature programmes from New York, Bridson maintained that "if the best use is to be made of American material, that material should be handled in New York by a British feature programme author-producer - one who not only come to the American scene with a fresh eye, seeing in it just those aspects and characteristics which appeal to him as an outside observer, but one who also knows the British listening public at first hand." At the time when Bridson is writing something on the lines he was suggesting was being attempted. Donald Boyd, a well known member of the B.B.C. news staff, had been travelling through the United States coast-to-coast in a recording car collecting interviews of American people. His experience confirmed what Bridson had anticipated. In the United States the man in the street had no familiarity with radio. The talks they gave were therefore rather disappointing. "There was no difficulty in approaching the men," he reported, "nor in getting them to talk to me, but I felt that they lacked some of the character which makes most English mechanics passably good talkers on the air." It was John Salt, of the New York office, who definitively explained this difference to Broadcasting House. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that the success the B.B.C. has had in recent years in putting the Little Man on the air has been due partly to a cumulative process of education." In the effort of projecting the United States in Britain the B.B.C. gradually perfected its images of America and refined its instruments of investigation into and report on its "real" America. Indeed in the early 1940s
the need for informative material directly promoting the understanding of America and American people was stronger than ever. The B.B.C. had always considered the promotion of international understanding (as the diplomacy of broadcasting called it) as part of its plan to educate its listeners but the quantity of the material produced began to alter the quality of the representations. In the documentaries produced during the war then, as in Cooke's talks or in the informative programmes produced by the North American Representative before 1939, the role of the Corporation as a filter of reality was further elaborated. Indeed the contingency of war if on one side it expanded the range of arguments and the total time devoted to America on the other declared as ultimately political any effort to represent the U.S. Ultimate control and sharp self-awareness on the subjects to select and the method to present them had increased along with the effort to depict America in as complex a picture as possible.

But the use of American material was not confined to those programmes purposefully devised to project the United States as a political and social organism. Variety programmes either conceived and recorded in the United States by the networks; or prepared and produced by the B.B.C. North American offices; or put up by the London staff with American artists or American ideas represented an increasing percentage of the B.B.C. light entertainment output. Between the beginning of 1942 and July 1943, the period when the Corporation had to provide programmes for the American troops stationed in Britain, this tendency accelerated so dramatically as to produce the impression of an avalanche. In February 1942 the B.B.C. Controllers sent out a note urging the importation of American items. Indeed, they argued, "our requirements for this [the variety] type of output are rather great now, by reason of the arrival of the American contingent, for which I feel we should try to provide at least 2 or 3 programmes per week." (619)

Here was another interesting test for the B.B.C. In terms of programme planning the need for programmes which would suit U.S. soldiers presented
problems similar to those encountered in the setting up of the North American Service; however, in practice the decisions taken were of much more consequence. While successes and failures of the N.A.S. affected a limited number of North American (and British) listeners, the need to provide regularly a number of programmes specifically studied to entertain American citizens could have much more direct effects on the B.B.C.'s own domestic audience. The Corporation's immediate reactions were worried but responsible. "We cannot spend much of our limited output aiming directly at the American troops," Laurence Gilliam, the assistant Director of Features wrote in August 1942. "We have a steady amount of programmes written and produced in New York on records, which is something," he went on. "Programmes of the 'Marching On' type - i.e. topical dramatisation which are in more or less American style - are likely to appeal, but generally speaking the ordinary American does not like British radio." But Gilliam thought it was an effort worth making. "It is going to be a very hard job to make him like it, but the attempt should be well worth making as it might result in the British listener liking British radio!" (620)

Indeed, reasons and indirect causes for inclusion of a greater quantity of American material were numerous. Apart from the necessity to project the United States as a benevolent country and cement the alliance between the two peoples, in addition to the need to provide information and entertainment to the American troops stationed in Britain, during the war a third condition favoured increased Anglo-American radio exchanges. Especially after Pearl Harbor but also before that, the U.S. networks were willing to let the B.B.C. have recordings of their programmes almost without charge. The B.B.C. internal correspondence of the war years is punctuated by proposals of this kind. As early as January 1941 Cecil Madden, Head of Variety for the Overseas Service, openly disclosed this opportunity to the Controller of Programmes. "A friend of mine has suggested that we might easily get some of the best American shows on the air on recordings sent over with the sponsorship cut out. In these days the sponsors would probably not mind this, and nearly all the big shows are
recorded for use on the small U.S.A. stations ... In addition, the American artists are sure to agree as a contribution to the Forces Programme here. In this way we could get some of the best of American radio shows on which a fortune is spent in scripting ... This might provide us with some relatively cheap air time, and make a change from the small amount of rather overworked British variety material available these days." (621)

Madden was referring to what was becoming a real problem for the B.B.C.: the lack of good, new, creative material in its variety output. Therefore it can be said that there were also internal developments which within the B.B.C. itself pushed in the direction of an increased co-operation with American broadcasters. Since the late 1930s the B.B.C. had to acknowledge that it could not afford to ignore what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic, that its own resources, material and creative, did not guarantee a regular flow of good light entertainment productions without some kind of vitalizing exchange with the United States. The situation was not improved by the war. Rather, it became even more dramatic. In July 1942 John Watt, the B.B.C. Director of Variety, gave a general alarm. "There are no new programme ideas coming along and some artificial stimulus is needed to get the flow going again." (622) In his third volume on the history of broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Asa Briggs has recounted the end of the story: "Watt sent his Assistant Director, Pat Hillyard, to the United States ... to 'bring back a team of writers and stars to infuse new life and competition into our present set up.' Hillyard ... signed an American script-writer, Hal Block, who arrived in London in February 1943." (623)

The frantic pursuing of exchanges with the United States however could not hinder the fact that there was something deeply wrong with the variety output, a diffused "blueness", a general lack of creativity which could not be solved in the short term, the variety producers claimed. "What the B.B.C. appear to require from us," wrote one of them, "is a standard of humour comparable to that of the top American programmes as well as their freedom from vulgarity
without either anything like equal facilities in regard to the collection of material." Their solution was always the same: increased salaries for script-writers and another visit to the United States "with the right to purchase a reasonable number of books and other material; facilities to sit in on the major American comedy programmes; the co-operation of the New York office to collect new script ideas and sample scripts; and, if possible, some kind of right of negotiation with the possibility in view of bringing over (a) some additional script-writers; (b) some good American radio comic." (624)

Not that American radio comics were by then at all absent from the B.B.C. output. Jack Benny and Bob Hope were perennial favourites. Their shows, either integral versions of American programmes or adaptations for the British audience, went on the air more or less continuously. On Sundays there were the "Jack Benny Half Hour," "a show which has all the slickness, the precision and the punch that one expects from across the water ... whether you enjoy the programme for themselves or bend your ear to them as curiosities, they are worth the hearing," (625) and a Bob Hope series. (626) Then there were Rudy Vallee, the famous radio singer, Burns and Allen, a couple of comedians, serial plays, dance bands and musical items. "Yankee-Doodle-Doo," another serial show, was invented as a container for American stars visiting Europe under the auspices of U.S.O. (United Services Organization). (627) The policy to be implemented had been indeed, since the very early days of "programme infiltration" and before that, to pack as many American items as the B.B.C. could possibly carry. (628)

Apart from the frequent re-broadcast of U.S. stars working in America, or occasionally visiting Britain, the B.B.C. could also count upon the steady presence and regular contribution of a number of American comedians living in the United Kingdom, already well known and in general liked by British listeners. If the most popular show in the war years was an all-British production ("I.T.M.A."), (629) "Hi Gang!", a show with a cast composed of Americans resident in England, also broke a new record in the history of the
B.B.C.: "we cannot remember any previous entertainment programme that ran for a full year without even the traditional summer break." (630)

"Hi Gang!" was "an American-style comedy series" (631) broadcast every Saturday night in the Forces Programme with a recording in the Home programme on Monday afternoon. It was built upon the comic personalities of Vic Oliver, Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels. "These names are magic in the theatre and on the air," the *Radio Times* commented. (632) They had all worked for Radio Luxembourg in 1938-1939, but while Oliver was already famous in Britain before that, the couple Lyon-Daniels were first introduced to the British audience by the commercial radio station. Ben Lyon first had the idea of producing a show where "'we all appear as ourselves, under our own names. I'll be the down-trodden one, you [Oliver] will be the smart one, and Bebe will be on your side. We'll insult each other for all we are worth.'" In the United States, this was an established formula which had launched many a famous comedian. In spite of Lyon's creative enthusiasm, however, they did not find it easy to convince the B.B.C. to put on the programme. "Our show was to be built on insults," Oliver's memories go on, "and insults are un-British." (633) Nevertheless, they managed to convince the B.B.C. to let them have a try. After a trembling start, the show went on. The first six weeks were extended to 128 consecutive performances only interrupted by Lyon's enlistment in the U.S. Army, in 1942. The British audience reacted positively to the Americanness of the show, and definitely included Lyon and Daniels in the list of its favourites. (634) Indeed the American artists working and living in Britain were hardly perceived as typically American as they never attempted to force an "alien" style upon the B.B.C. audience. They were considered as established a part of British culture as any of its all-native showmen. Being aware of the differences between a British and an American audience they worked on them. If they succeeded in importing styles and ideas originally conceived to appeal to U.S. listeners, they also knew very well that in order to become popular in Britain they had to translate those models and adapt them to a different tradition.
By the end of 1942-beginning of 1943, American material under very many headings represented a good percentage of the B.B.C. output. Soon, doubts on the desirability of such an invasion of U.S. programmes and items began to be voiced. The launching of the American Forces Network in Britain in July 1943 partially changed matters. After that, those who within the B.B.C. had more or less radically despised the increasing Americanization of its output could speak again. More generally, in the course of the Summer of 1943 the domestic side of the Anglo-American co-operation in radio matters was separated from its international contours. Gradually, British radio went back to its supposedly natural Britishness.

5.4 - The American Forces Network and the Return to Defensiveness, 1944-1950

"When the Government and the B.B.C. were induced to agree to the setting up of an American Forces Network to bring American radio to the American troops," Gorham states, "the biggest revolution in British radio history was inaugurated." (635) Anglo-American military and political co-operation was enabling British listeners to acquire first-hand knowledge of commercial radio with the blessing of the public Corporation.

Nevertheless, if the B.B.C. had indeed nurtured all sorts of anxieties and fears when A.F.N. first went on the air, the immediate consequence for its own output was that it had not to provide American programmes for the allied troops any more; and that a more informed discussion over the desirability of the policy of "programme infiltration" could be started. It might be a curious coincidence that the idea that a danger might lay ahead in the future of the open door policy of the B.B.C. was first uttered in July 1943. R. A. Rendall, Assistant Controller (Overseas Service) had then just returned from a visit to United States, Canada, Mexico and Jamaica where he had gone to supervise the traffic both from and to the American continent. In the United States he found a situation which had prompted him to think of what was going to happen after the war. "American radio men," he warned Broadcasting House, "have got their
eye closely on post-war developments. They are much interested in the effect of U.S. commercial entertainment programmes on the British audience. Such an interest is not entirely academic; many of them regard our use of Benny, Hope etc. as the thin end of a wedge ... I am not competent to discuss these matters," he added, "but I was impressed by the liveliness of thought and talk about them and wondered how far we, with our smaller resources and greater preoccupations, should be able to keep pace with all that is going on and watch the drive that will go into development as soon as industry begins to be freed of some of its war commitments (which is already happening in a few cases)."

(636) A month later Pat Hillyard, Assistant Director of Variety, was urging the New York office to keep their "ears open for any new programme ... that you think might be more suitable than any of those we are at present broadcasting. As American Forces are now very well catered for by their own troop network," he added, "we have now to think much more in terms of our own British listeners' appreciation." (637)

Indeed the very logic which had led from the admission of the unsatisfactory production of the variety staff to the cry for American help and American inputs began to be openly questioned. In December, four days after the appeal for more U.S. artists uttered by Cecil Madden, Norman Collins, General Overseas Service Manager, declared: "It seems to me wrong that we should rely exclusively on the Americans for scripts, production, ideas, and artists. There may be such a dearth of English talent that this is the right short-term policy, but I think it would be disastrous if the B.B.C. as a whole accepted the position that only by becoming American can we compete with the Americans."

(638) Gradually all the elements which had been viewed as pressure points for the introduction of American material were discarded one by one. It was the beginning of a very long debate and a longer process in which the ghosts of America and Americanization would once more be evoked in the role of threatening invaders. No later than February 1944 R. A. Rendall urged Collins to handle with extreme suspicion the offers of programmes coming from the U.S.
networks. "In general I think we must be careful to see that we do not become an agent for American cultural propaganda," he warned. (639) He was thinking of the Overseas Service. However his feelings coincided with growing dissatisfactions among the home services staff.

"I do not feel we should remain satisfied with a state of affairs in which we have to put regular American programmes into our home service because we have nothing better of our own. So long as this is the case ... there is no room for the B.B.C. to do brave things, and the complaint that the programme change means a weakening of the Home Service or even demands a quart to be forced into a pint pot falls to the ground. Admitting all our difficulties of manpower, and making every allowance to the fact that we are in the fifth year of war, I think we should do all we can to stimulate the production of ideas for entertainment and features, for which we can build up at least as good listener figures as those we have encouraged for these American programmes."

(640) When he wrote these lines, W. J. Haley was still B.B.C. Editor-in-Chief, an office which he was the first to hold. (641) A month later however he would be appointed B.B.C. Director General. His words therefore must have carried weight.

While discussions on the suitability of American programmes or single items were gradually substituting the enthusiastic and unselective pro-Americanism of 1942-43, Haley further clarified where the B.B.C. was to stand on the matter of U.S. material soon after his appointment as Director General. In June 1944 he wrote to the Controller (Programmes), Basil Nicolls, with the explicit aim of reducing the percentage of American staff in the B.B.C. output. "Don't let us become too consciously America-conscious in our programmes. In addition to all the regular items we have already, I notice among forthcoming arrangements 'The Martin and the Coys', 'The Spirit of '76', and 'Prairie Soldier.' Each of these items can doubtless be justified in itself, but if the process continues, they will add up to too much." (642) Then, in July Haley
asked Wellington to start an internal inquiry to establish how much American material was being broadcast. (643) The question was posed to the Director of Programme Planning and then to the departments. The ensuing report, sketched down by Lindsay Wellington, was striking no matter how sceptical the author's approach. "These statistics," Wellington warned his Director General, "do not help us much with our problem. No catalogue of the number of American programmes broadcast in this country - programmes varying in kind and intention from Raymond Swing to Bob Hope, and in length from 2 minutes to 45 - can answer your question whether the right or the wrong impact is being made on British listeners by our broadcasts from or about the United States." However, he was convinced, a few clear ideas could still be put down on paper so as to facilitate the complex endeavour. Wellington then lucidly tried to distinguish between informational programmes which, he thought, should continued to be broadcast, and programmes of a lighter type. "There is Listener Research evidence," he argued, "that a considerable body of listeners has a prima facie interest in programmes about America and its inhabitants, and no evidence that I can discover that listeners dislike programmes about America as such." Entertainment programmes were a different matter. "They command enthusiastic listeners ..., they supplement British resources in the field in which at present we are weakest, and they are free, and therefore supplement a programme allowance which has not kept pace with increasing programme costs. On the other hand, they whet an appetite which we shall not be able to satisfy after the war." (644)

Haley, while appreciating Wellington's attempt at a differentiation between the informative and the characteristic kind of programmes, indeed found that the total amount of American material in general broadcast by the B.B.C. greatly exceeded what he considered desirable and wise even in war circumstances. He therefore insisted on pursuing his wide attack. At the beginning of July in a Programme Policy meeting he urged a general discussion "on three types of American material in Home programmes ...: 1) 'canned'
American entertainment, 2) exchange programmes with the Chains, 3) material supplied by the New York office." (645) In August he reiterated the idea and transformed it into a directive urging his staff to keep the quantity of recorded American serial broadcasts under strict control. "It is noticeable," he maintained, "that in many cases there is no original listener enthusiasm for such programmes; it has grown because of the B.B.C.'s persistence. It is also essential that the existence of such programmes shall not become an excuse for relaxation of effort on the part of the B.B.C. to produce similar programmes of equal merit of its own." (646)

At the September 29, 1944 Programme Policy meeting it was openly declared that the B.B.C. was preparing to enter its post-war phase and that the volume of American broadcasts "must fit into post-war pattern." It was decided that the "maximum of American material in Home Service" had been reached and that a decrease of American entertainment was to be aimed at, "quality rather than quantity" being "the guiding principle." (647)

Meanwhile the Director General was asking the Controllers of European Service, of Programmes, and the Assistant Controller of the Overseas Service to state their opinions on a general memorandum dealing with "Post-war broadcasting to and from U.S.A." written by Wellington. (648) The discussion which had followed Haley's directive had in fact eventually convinced the determined Director General that policies relating to Eastbound and Westbound traffic with the United States had to be elaborated as a whole no matter how distant the two might appear to the listeners. (649) Haley's call for a reduction of American material had been interpreted as a restriction in international activities. It was not so, Wellington's memorandum helped the Director General to say. Indeed it could all be seen as a general revivification of a national British spirit within a more intense policy of exchanges. Haley himself would later express this idea in a more general and rhetorical form. "Broadcasting will develop as an international form," he
proclaimed, "... the more it communicates a friendly and understanding nationalism rather than a colourless internationalism." (650)

These broader political and cultural implications of Haley's position remained in the background of the discussion which followed the issuing of Wellington's memorandum. Its main terms were summarized in the general statement of policy sent out in December 1944. The necessity for exchange programmes with the U.S. networks and more generally the B.B.C. commitment to project Britain in North America (even with reduced expenditures) were in their most generic lines re-asserted. However, insofar as Eastbound operations were concerned, it was decided that "American material is to be included in Home Service programmes entirely on its programme value. The international value of a project is not a justifiable make-weight if programme value is deficient." It was the ultimate abandonment of the policy of "programme infiltration" invented at the beginning of the war. It was also agreed that "the space given to U.S. material must be considered in relation to the space given to Commonwealth material and European material," even if the B.B.C. had to acknowledge that as "the fact that the United States has the advantage of Europe in a common language, and of the Commonwealth nations in wealth of material, ... it will not be in the best interests of programme value to work to a strict numerical proportion." In conclusion, the document recommended, "we should maintain a small eastbound production staff of high-class general utility, supplemented from time to time by visiting specialists; The staff should be so based as to make it possible to tap all the most likely programme resources, including Hollywood." (651)

The policy traditionally pursued by the B.B.C. towards U.S. broadcasting was thus plainly re-asserted. It implied a selective but careful interest in what was going on in American radio and a firm commitment to defend the national listening habits. In December 1944, in a famous memorandum on "Post-War Programmes Set-Up," Basil Nicolls, the B.B.C. Senior Controller, began his list of directives with an unequivocal statement: "The programmes shall be
firmly British in character." And then specified, "this implies in particular an effective resistance to the Americanisation of our entertainment." (652)

Even before the actual end of the war, then, it was clear that the transition from the sway of international politics to that of commercial evaluations would have spelled the end of the idealistic opening up of cultural barriers. The same programmes which had once been welcomed as symbols of an efficient and smooth alliance became dangerous Trojan horses, symptoms of a future economic predominance of the United States. VE Day further strengthened these defensive trends. When the Allied Expeditionary Forces programme closed down on July 28, 1945 the last remnants of Anglo-American-Canadian co-operation in broadcasting disappeared. A.E.F. had been launched in June 1944 to provide "a radio service to the men of the invasion forces, British, American and Canadian," (653) and it had indeed been international in its programmes and staff even if the B.B.C. retained ultimate control. If post-war circumstances would further explain and strengthen the defensive policies of the Corporation, the intrinsic source of their appearance lay in the dynamics set in motion in 1944 and had clear cultural origins. The determination to defend what were thought to be or were 'invented' as the national habits and preferences was the first motivation which had urged Haley to intervene. The political climate allowed him to do it but his first and foremost priority was to defend British culture (in its deepest, anthropological meaning). He therefore not only wanted to decide on every single item to be included in the B.B.C. output: "The DG said that the amount of American material now being carried in the Home and General Forces Programmes should not be increased without reference to him," it was warned. He was also equally determined to protect the home and overseas listeners from an excessive exposure to American ways and culture: "and any alterations in timing which tends to improve the audience," the directive significantly went on, "... should also be referred." (654)

The self-conscious policy to keep low the percentage of American material was maintained through 1948-1949 more or less along the lines set forth by
Haley in 1944. Whatever the subsequent sources of these reactions, the underground tensions which had accompanied the whole history of the broadcasting war alliance had come out in the open in 1944. A year before the end of the hostilities an explicit policy of imposition of quotas on foreign cultural influences had already been devised and the most threatening suspicions had found a wide echo.

5.5 - After the War

True, the post-war political climate and economic circumstances would provide for a much more congenial background to these cultural restrictions. Several reasons were either explicitly admitted or hinted at or can be guessed from a later perspective which could justify the extension of those defensive feelings in post-war Britain. As a wider but ever present background, the aggressive policy pursued by the United States insofar as cinematographic productions were concerned must have played a not insignificant role. (655) But there were also domestic circumstances which should be taken into account. On the part of the B.B.C. there might have been a sense of relief for not having to follow too literally the directives which political strategies had imposed upon it; and a genuine paternalistic worry over the destinies of British artists, writers, creative broadcasters and the Britishness of their productions. But there were also insurmountable material contingencies. Immediately after the war Britain found itself heavily indebted. The situation of the dollar would not have allowed massive importations of material produced by the U.S. commercial radio stations (656) even if they had been considered desirable. Besides, any expansionist policy would have run up against the underconsumistic aims of the economic policies of post-war governments. (657)

The B.B.C. however did not simply follow the trend. The Corporation had its own reasons to jump on the boat of parochialism. Apart from the threat to the development of native entertainment and broadcasting techniques, apart from the effort to keep out the lavish American productions which might have induced
dissatisfaction and restlessness, it was also feared that U.S. radio staff might one day just disappear from the microphones of the B.B.C. and go back into masses to the commercial stations transmitting from the Continent as it had happened before the war. (658) Or, worse, they might encourage American enterprises to engage directly in the competition: fears that the U.S. might intervene on the broadcasting scene were still strong after the war. The B.B.C. had not got enough money to compete with foreign commercial stations who could buy American recordings and employ American artists. Therefore, U.S. programmes which were regularly broadcast by the B.B.C. "long before the arrival of American troops in the United Kingdom" were discontinued lest the B.B.C. would thus keep "together an audience for shows that may one day figure as commercial rivals to our own broadcasts." (659) Indeed the fear that continental stations might be brought back into existence played an important role in the new "anti-American" policy of the B.B.C., as would appear clearly in 1947-1948, when the plans to keep Radio Luxembourg under some form of allied control were abandoned. As a result, while American artists insisted in attempting to build up (or to maintain) a British audience for their shows, the B.B.C. became increasingly suspicious of their apparently advantageous offers. In July 1948 Michael Standing, the Head of Variety, reported that Jack Benny's British agent, Lew Grade, had proposed to him "to have the use of the next American Benny series recorded and edited free of advertising matter." It was a very appealing offer which could only be refused out of very strong motivations, Standing commented, and it could hardly be said, he added, that a single series might indeed produce "too strong an American influence on listeners." (660) But it was not the first time that this was happening. "I think I am right in saying that offers of this sort have been made to us since 1945," the Acting Controller (Light Programme) replied. But they had been rarely accepted. He did not try to question the quality of the programmes nor Benny's popularity with British listeners. He could only remind Standing that it was a more serious matter than he seemed to imply. "The objections that have weighed with D.G.
... almost entirely concerned with the revival of commercial radio. If this
restarted from Luxembourg or Radio Normandie on any scale, we should no longer
get the Jack Benny show free of charge. Why, therefore, argues D.G., build up
an audience for something which may for all we know be transferred to our
deadliest rivals at the drop of a hat?" (661) This was the slogan which since
1944 (662) informed the policy officially pursued by Broadcasting House on the
proposals repeatedly put forward by famous American artists. It projected
itself well into the early 1950s almost without change.

The North American Office policy was also more decidedly re-addressed
after the war to meet with the new requirements. Most of its efforts were
thereafter directed towards the promotion of B.B.C. recordings (or
Transcriptions as they were called), on one side, and the translation and
filtering of American material so that it would suit B.B.C.'s requirements, on
the other. Both policies were pursued with a growing self-confidence. Even the
North American Service underwent a process of "Britishization" and it openly
laid claims to this re-nationalisation. In 1946 the new N.A.S. Director, J.
Warren MacAlpine, maintained strongly that "we do not try to imitate American
broadcasting." This meant, he added, that the elaboration of the differences
between the two cultures and audiences had reached a mature stage. "It has been
found," he explained, "with a people so personal and often so sentimental as
the Americans it is important to distinguish between what might be called the
'knowledge about Britain' and the acquaintance with British types of
programmes, and to provide a relatively high percentage of the latter." (663)
Meanwhile, the B.B.C. was also deciding to draw that same distinction within
what had until then been identified as American programmes - and to provide a
relative high percentage of the programmes offering knowledge about the United
States. Maurice Gorham, now Head of the Light Programme, left no doubt about
it. "I do not want to use American radio formulae for the home audience, but on
the contrary to use America itself as a source of novelty and colour interest
in programmes produced as far as possible with the British listeners in mind."
Reciprocity had to be kept to a minimum. This policy was pursued with such a determination that in 1948 a B.B.C. producer could detect in Broadcasting House a complete lack of interest in "the products of American radio." (665)

It was not a balanced view of reality, though. American material had been partially eliminated and had undoubtedly decreased since 1944 but it still represented a fair percentage of the B.B.C. output. On March 1946 a new series of Cooke's talks went on the air. It was the birth of the famous serial which he would call "Letters from America." "They were commissioned ... for a tentative run of thirteen weeks," Cooke recounts. Then, "by the grace of the B.B.C., the receptiveness of the British listener, and the stubborn endurance of the pound sterling" they were still going on in the 1970s. Expressing a general post-war relief Cooke decided not to relate "the procedures of the American Senate and the subtleties of the corn-hog ratio" and decidedly preferred to talk about the American "way of life" and "tastes." (666) The Radio Times still carried announcements on American stars and American programmes to be broadcast.

Furthermore the changes which Briggs pointed out as long-term significant changes brought forward by the war can be interpreted as British adaptations of an original American inspiration. To the attitudes towards news, the "continuity system" and soap operas, another broad transformation should be added, originally devised in the United States and slowly looked at with ever greater sympathy by the B.B.C.: the "fixed-point" system, especially for variety productions. In the B.B.C.'s own vision, this was indeed the most marked change which intervened in the early 1940s: "Before 1939, when the output was about half of what it is now," the Corporation recounted, "there was a larger proportion of shows arranged singly; long series of shows like Music Hall or 'Band Waggon' were the exception. The much larger output of today could not be maintained with existing resources, in terms of writers, artists and
producers, without planning the great majority of the programmes in series."
(667)

All in all when at the beginning of the 1950s television began to supplant radio in the listeners' hearts and sitting rooms and, more reluctantly, in the B.B.C.'s own strategies, an alert radio critic could still detect what could be termed a high degree of Americanization. The struggle over "The English Family Robinson" was eventually won by its supporters and soap operas soon became an established feature of the B.B.C. output. Even quizzes were being imported. "They had come into favour during the war, when cash-prizes were first given in "Merry-Go-Round", and after the war they multiplied, though the prizes never became so important a factor as they did in the 'give-away' programmes of American radio." (668) Audience participation shows in general flourished.

Members of staff who had had some kind of American experience during the war went back to their home jobs and carried with them ideas and impressions. At the very high levels of the B.B.C. hierarchy, the two officials who were put in charge of the Home Service and the Light Programme (respectively Lindsay Wellington and Maurice Gorham) had served during the war as B.B.C. North American Directors. Wellington's Deputy Director, John Salt, was appointed Programme Director of the North Region. There he urged the production of one of the most popular shows of the late 1940s, "Have a Go." It was a quiz programme but of a peculiar kind, as Salt explained to its first quiz master, Wilfred Pickles. "It was to be a quiz in which I would give money away for correct answers to three or four questions," Pickles recounts. "'I want to get away from script programmes, to find something spontaneous," Salt explained. "'They do a lot of this sort of thing in America, you know - but their stuff comes from the studios. We must get out and about, visit a different place each week ...' 'And interview ordinary folks,' I said, becoming more and more interested." (669)

Apart from the members of the staff who had worked in the United States, the Corporation was also employing more and more producers and artists who had
collaborated with the commercial stations before the war. Howard Thomas was one of them. He was recruited at the beginning of 1940, when the establishment of the Forces Programme as an alternative to the Home Service almost overnight multiplied the B.B.C. needs for entertainment. John Watt, Head of Variety since the late 1930s, thought of him when he decided that the easiest way out to launch the new programme could be the introduction of "the American quiz programme, Information please, in which listeners were offered cash prizes if they could stump the experts." (670) While the Corporation had always tried to avoid the too frivolous American example, this time Watt proposed the U.S. shows as an explicit model to the producers of the show he was asking for. Their task however was to try to find a balance between "intellectualism and entertainment," as they put it. A member of the Features Department, Cleverdon, was therefore placed at Thomas' side. "My concept was totally different from Cleverdon's," Thomas complained. "Our opposite approaches typified the difference between the traditional B.B.C. and the new invasion from the outside world. His formula followed B.B.C. practice by giving the Forces what was good for them. My proposals were aiming at winning a reluctant audience." (671) Thomas won the fight and "Any Questions?" - transformed later in the very popular "Brains' Trust" - was born. Still it was not exactly an American importation. The effort "to convey information in as entertaining a form as possible" (672) was the result of the adaptation of the American formula to the peculiar idiosyncrasies of British broadcasting. Whatever its national mark, once more the translation spelled success. (673)

Among the most popular "Americanized" shows of the post-war years "Ignorance is Bliss" and "Twenty Questions" should be mentioned. The B.B.C. Canadian announcer Stewart MacPherson was involved in the production of both of them. Maurice Winnick, MacPherson's theatrical agent, and a few years later one of the leading figures of commercial television in England, had convinced the B.B.C. to produce "Ignorance is Bliss," a programme directly imported from Broadway whose original American title was "It Pays to Be Ignorant." MacPherson
was asked to play as the question master. What came out was a quick, slightly
crazy quiz where unusual questions were asked to a panel of famous
personalities who in turn answered crazily. (674) The same idea was later
perfected with "Twenty Questions" which would enjoy an even greater success:
first broadcast in February 1947 it was still on the air in 1955. (675) Less
surreal than "Ignorance is Bliss," the purpose of the game was that the
participating panel guessed the mysterious object the listeners were told about
before the show by asking no more than twenty questions. MacPherson and,
Winnick, who had proposed it to the B.B.C., got the idea and the title from a
U.S. radio programme. The British Corporation liked it, adapted the programme
and introduced it into its output. What the British listeners listened to and
enjoyed, however, was quite different from what the American audience had been
hearing under the same title. "In New York ... the way prizes are given,"
MacPherson explains, "would shake the people of Britain who are not accustomed
to the commercial aspect of radio ... [In the U.S.] Bill Slater is the question
master. He merely answers 'Yes' or 'No' which method many British listeners
claim is the system we should follow in the B.B.C. We do not agree, however,
for we consider more fun comes of skidding around the bush with the panel than
comes of leaving them completely in the dark, without a clue ... While it sounds
like patting ourselves on the back I believe the British version of 'Twenty
Questions' is more amusing than its American counterpart. At the same time I
think 'It Pays to Be Ignorant' is a better show than our 'Ignorance is Bliss.'":
(676)

To talk in terms of a "lack of interest" towards what was happening in
U.S. radio was an exaggeration due to a rather sudden inversion of policy and
if a general view of the B.B.C. output is taken, also a gross mystification.
But something had indeed changed. If the Corporation's members of staff
continued to flock to the United States especially to see what was going on in
television and frequency modulation, (677) if since 1946 the B.B.C. Research
Department in New York produced monthly a "North American Intelligence Bulletin," (678) the pre-war determination to defend the British audience from American influence had not been lessened by the fighting alliance. In 1946, coming back from the United States, Val Gielgud found that American radio could be even less interesting than in the late 1930s. "When I was last in the States," he wrote, "in 1938, I felt that both in production methods and in certain fields of experiment the B.B.C. had much to learn from the other side of the Atlantic" - but he had not written it so explicitly in the Radio Times, at the time! "A month ago I felt that the boot was on the other foot." (679) Declarations like these were endlessly repeated for the various fields of broadcasting.

Light entertainment, perhaps the most sensitive issue given the traditional weakness of British native productions, was also the object of a long comparative report in March 1949. Its author, Ronald Waldman, had spent 33 days in the States trying to grasp the basic qualities of "Light Entertainment in American broadcasting." His conclusions, apparently balanced, summarize neatly what the B.B.C. attitude was towards the most Americanized of its productions and give a fair idea of the basic differences between British and American variety as they had been built up in almost thirty years of experience. "It would be foolish of me," he wrote wisely, "to say that we had everything or nothing to learn from American radio. One basic and obvious fact, however, must be admitted. American radio is a wealthy industry; it is able to attract the finest creative and interpretative brains in any sphere into which it wishes to move. The fact that it does not, in fact, operate in as many spheres of broadcasting as it could (even in the field of light entertainment) and the additional fact that many of these fine brains at its disposal are often misused, or even wasted, is a product of the desire always to secure a majority audience." This last condition was, according to Waldman, the first and foremost difference which emerged from a comparison between the two systems. "The creators of American radio entertainment are compelled to appeal
to a mass audience, otherwise the money to finance their productions will be withdrawn. In this country these conditions apply to, say, 90% of the Variety output, but the remaining 10% is permitted to appeal to minority audiences."

This basic fact made for the divergence in styles and approaches which everybody was talking about, Waldman believed. He found for instance that "the number of different types of light entertainment programmes in America is small. We are not so limited." Or that "the range between very good and very bad in the quality of American shows is surprisingly wide. Our best is never as good as the American best, but our worst is infinitely better than the American worst." Insofar as the causes of this were concerned, he reckoned that the influence of advertising interests often made "demands that are harmful to the quality of the programmes." While in Britain "the only interference with the quality of the programme stems from lack of means and insufficiently high professional standards." (680)

Waldman is giving here a careful description of the ocean which divided British and American broadcasting. In terms of the B.B.C.'s actual programme policies and productions these divergencies resulted in an ambiguous policy towards America, an irresistible impulse towards the absorption of any influence which came from the other side of the Atlantic, a desire for integration in a wider, more powerful, more resourceful culture, and a twofold resistance to that integration, the conscious defence of the national culture and cultural industry (681) and certain idiosyncrasies and peculiar characteristics of the national productions which seemed to suit the national audience. Comparing certain images of U.S. broadcasting elaborated in the pre-war years with the realities of B.B.C. programming in the 1940s-early 1950s could help to assess the strength of those policies of resistance, their transformation in a more expanding world which was approaching the "End of Victorianism." (682) A diachronical comparison could therefore at this point tentatively explain how far the Britishness of the B.B.C. did survive the war
and the post-war years, to what extent it could be declared an almost "natural" feature which did not change substantially in varying historical circumstances.
6.1 - An Overview of the B.B.C. 's Policy Towards American Interferences

Since the very early days of the 1929 memorandum warning against the Americanization of the entertainment industry, the B.B.C. pursued a complex policy to deal with the impact that American broadcasting could have and had upon its output. While it usually resisted the infiltration of American influence till the very last, the Corporation often had to give in and acknowledge that there was something to be learnt from U.S. radio. Especially since the late 1930s, and more clearly after the war and as a direct consequence of it, the effort towards popularization resulted in an increasing, if superficial, American influence. Even then, even when it was praising American models, however, the B.B.C. mechanically repeated its claim to a national heritage. In its publications, it maintained consistently that its programmes were truly British. And in its actual productions it pursued, where it could, different programmes in different styles with American radio playing the role of the imperfect model. Since the 1930s, American models were attentively studied, partially adopted and in greater part translated to suit British ears. Only between 1940 and 1943 imports from the broadcasting services of the United States were not accompanied with a note of disdain. During the first three years of war the "rabid pro-Americanism" which was lying hidden in the minds of some British radio men could express itself without restrictions of any sort. This period of 'free trade,' though limited, left important marks upon the B.B.C. Before and after that the rhetorical and factual emphasis was always put on difference and, wherever might be the case, on competition. "In general, so far as programmes are concerned," the B.B.C. Chief Engineer wrote in 1934 after a one-month visit to the United States, "I feel almost sure that they would not be acceptable in any country in Europe which I have visited. There is far more
The divergence was not so much pronounced in terms of the programme components of the overall output broadcast in the two countries as in the very early days of broadcasting many had thought. The Radio Times published in 1933 the results of an analysis of the N.B.C. programmes which the U.S. network had produced for 1932 and used it for a quick, sketchy comparison with the B.B.C. output. The results were instructive. "Of the N.B.C. programmes," it reported, "66.3 per cent consisted of music. Analysis of our own Daventry National programme for 1933 reveals approximately 40% of music. The American analysis is, however, inclusive; it takes in all musical items of a vaudeville nature, whereas the British figures do not count vaudeville or other productions." The gap was not very wide, at least on the percentage of musical items, at the time the single most important element of the broadcasting output. "The N.B.C. analysis," the Radio Times went on, slightly ironically, "includes 2.3 per cent of physical training programmes. This department has yet to be introduced in Britain." (684) But then it fairly concluded: "We are apt to think of American radio as being entirely frivolous. In view of this, it is interesting to note the N.B.C.'s claim that in 1932 24.1 per cent of its programmes were educational." (685)

However, insofar as the style and conception of the programme components were concerned, in the 1930s there indeed were proofs to be cited to demonstrate how different the two broadcasting cultures could be. After all, Eddie Pola thrived on the "strangeness" of U.S. radio. The following editorial published by the Radio Times in February 1933 does not only elaborate on the theme of distance. It openly invites the readers (and the B.B.C. management) to learn something about it. "A film recently released from Hollywood takes an American radio station for its setting," the article announces. "This picture should be of special interest to British wireless listeners as revealing the marked
differences between broadcast entertainment in this country and its equivalent in the United States. In the course of the film a vaudeville entertainment is shown in progress. After watching these scenes in the film, the thoughtful listener will come away with the double impression that, while American radio has startling vitality in its method of presentation, its material, which largely consists of songs of the jazz order sung by artist of the genus 'crooner' is, to British ears at least, confined within a rut of lowering and monotonous sentimentality." But, the Radio Times then wonders, to what extent should the British stick to their hydiosinchrasies? Cannot sentimentality be a precious asset in "mechanised entertainment," when it can bridge "the gap that lies between the loud-speaker and the audience"? And it concludes: "Though much that their vitality contributes to radio on that side of the Atlantic would be termed 'vulgar' on this, there can be no doubt that in the full-blooded test of his approach to the microphone, in the frank intimacy of his attitude towards his audience, the American broadcaster contrives to establish more quickly than his British brother the spell which is necessary if, in light entertainment, an audience is to be held by sound alone." (686)

It was however a powerless cry. The British tradition which the B.B.C. did so much to identify with and in certain instances to invent would not have allowed for the introduction of a degree of emotional broadcasting as high as the American. The British had managed to devitalize even the unpredictable Amateur Hours, had transformed the Spelling Bees into classroom contests. Studio audiences, generally considered by American broadcasters and listeners as belonging to the very nature of broadcasting and were indeed the simplest device which could be used to introduce emotional elements in any show, were in Britain highly controversial up to the late 1930s. (687) Cash prizes, which had a sure, thrilling effect, were introduced in an ambiguous form before the war but were then ruled out again in 1949. (688) Sensationalism was banned from B.B.C. information even in the new post-war atmosphere. "The B.B.C.'s programmes
possess the virtues of being wholesome and edifying but lack adequate safeguards against dullness" was the ultimate judgement of the editor of the Listener who was once more comparing it with U.S. broadcasting. "If the B.B.C. attached more importance to making a hit, and less importance to making a mistake, its programmes might acquire some of the American 'pep' without losing the virtue of British reticence." (689)

There lies the core of the matter. In the preceding chapters dealing with B.B.C. programmes between the 1920s and the 1950s the reasoning and the descriptions offered have often run along the lines of the same deep ambiguity which Lambert is talking about and which deserves now a more open, detailed treatment. Generally speaking it could be asserted, and it has been asserted here and elsewhere, that the B.B.C. output underwent a process of Americanization in the period under analysis. Many formats, ideas, artists, were imported from U.S. radio. But what does Americanization stand for here if Lambert can praise an American model and urge the B.B.C. to adopt it and at the same time hope that the Corporation will not lose its British traits?

To start with, three objections can be raised to any general statement proclaiming the Americanized nature of British radio after the war. They might help to determine what was British about the B.B.C. programmes and how is to be interpreted a series of facts described as a process of Americanization. First of all, only a small part of the imported American material was broadcast in England exactly in the same forms in which it had originally been produced. The normal fate of a U.S. radio item was the adaptation to what the B.B.C. called the "natural tastes and preferences" of the British audience. Those national peculiarities could vary from plain facts such as the inability to understand certain North American accents, or the obvious unfamiliarity with facts and sounds of a foreign country, to subtler difficulties derived for instance from a different sense of humour, or from a cooler, more didactic approach to news and
comment. American comedians working for the B.B.C. provide plenty of stories on
the necessity to adapt U.S. stuff, in this case in body and soul, to British
tastes. Even Bob Hope's shows were cut, dubbed and edited in London. (690)
Indeed, since the very first days of comedians' exchanges, basically of American
importations to enliven the B.B.C. light entertainment, it became apparent that
laughs bear a strong national mark. In the second place even when British
artists and producers endeavoured to copy certain U.S. radio programmes, what
normally came out in the end was something which still remained peculiarly
branded. The post-war approach to news and comments reveal that strange mix of
Americanized Britishness which informed much of the B.B.C. output. The same re-
emergence of a national style characterized the history of the most popular
programme of the 1940s, "It's That Man Again." Indeed, as Briggs has remarked,
"I.T.M.A." constitutes a fascinating chapter of the confused vicissitudes of
American influence. (691) Lastly, a third area of enquiry to discover some
traits of the contours of the Britishness in broadcasting were those fields in
which the B.B.C. most successfully and fully resisted the American models, as in
its dramatic productions. The B.B.C. drama and feature productions in the early
1950s were world-famous. They too could only had been produced, it was felt, by
British radio people.

Something like a peculiar Britishness of the B.B.C. programmes might
therefore have existed and its traits might emerge more clearly from a
comparison with the American models. A striking fact, as the pro-American Gorham
wrote after the war, is that the audience liked better those items bearing a
national mark. "Take for instance the real story of American radio and its
impact on the British audience during the war," he maintains. "It began when the
B.B.C. was allowed to use American programmes ... Later on these programmes
became a great feature of the General Forces Programme, and they were very
popular indeed. But good as they were they were made for an American audience,
and a good British show was more popular still." (692) If essentially
authoritarian, the strategies adopted by the B.B.C. to come to terms with the
U.S. radio productions and with American influence on British mass culture
received occasionally popular support, as the listeners' response to the
"Britishized" programmes would seem to show. Insofar as the B.B.C. was not only
a bureaucratic apparatus deciding upon what was and what was not to be included
in the national culture, as it transformed itself into a phenomenon reaching
unselected social strata, but a live medium of mass communication which had to
respond to its listeners, its policy towards American influence must have had a
significance which went beyond the personal beliefs and individual background of
its personnel.

6.2 - Exploring Indicators of Britishness

"Is America Killing Our Sense of Humour?"

This was the anguished title of an article published on the first page of
the July 3-9 issue of the Radio Times. Its author was Basil Maine, the well
known music critic. Maine's essential argument was that the old English sense of
humour, which was as much part of the established national institutions as
Parliament, the countryside, the Navy or cricket, was giving way to a new "puny,
empty, loud, raucous thing not worthy of the homely name of humour." This
despicable development, he asserted, was a direct result of the American Talkies
which were inundating the movie theatres all over Britain. However, Maine also
maintained, the battle was not over yet. As the defenders of a native culture
had said about jazz, he declared himself convinced that the popular appetite for
American entertainment would gradually fade away. Soon, he predicted, all those
who are so eager to hear, see and assimilate the novelties coming from the
United States will get tired of them and go back to their natural (national)
propensities. The article then ended on a disquieting generalization. The
popular listener, according to Maine, "no longer deceived by inflated
reputations" will re-discover English comedians, such as Robey, Billy Bennett,
Stanley Lupino, Jack Barty, Will Hay, and Gillie Potter and "he will be the happier for this discovery; for unnatural laughter is, more than gloom itself, a sure sign of temperamental disorder." To further stress the mark of foreign and unnatural which he is stamping upon U.S. humour, he then described American comedians as "those strange humourists whose laughter is based upon man's mortality or upon threatened physical violence or upon gross insolence." (693)

A few years later Charles Brewer, B.B.C. Assistant Director of Variety, declared, on that same subject, that when in 1935 he had visited the United States he had been "particularly interested in studying the methods of American radio comedians and in finding where the paths of American humour and British humour converge and diverge." According to Brewer, Americans possessed "a greater creative sense of humour than we do ... It is a well known fact," he goes on, "that the average American is frequently disappointed at our innate reluctance to indulge in anything more than the simplest of words." Nonetheless he maintained that the British had got something "in the nature of unconscious humour arising from the misuse of words." "Malapropism," he stated, might probably be identified as a typically English humouristic device. (694)

In 1950 a comment on B.B.C. programmes directed towards the United States identified much the same difficulties. "It is commonly believed in the United States," it was reported, "that the British have no sense of humour; many British believe that the Americans cannot laugh at themselves. The truth is that both nations are touchy about this business of sense of humour." So, if the North American Service document arrived at different conclusions, (i.e. that both nations enjoyed "laughing over much the same things") it confirmed all the same that the matter of what was to be considered funny was more complicated than one might have assumed. (695)

That a difficulty in laughing at exactly the same type of jokes which Americans laughed at existed is hardly surprising. As the first Mass Observation report on "the subject of humour" concluded in 1940, humour is strictly related
to familiar situations and circumstances. "It is essential for humour," the social researchers found out, "to be concerned with everyday life, with events and subjects which are known to every member of the audience" - a discovery which implied that humour is, and has to be, in many instances, a national matter linked as it is with communication facilities. Their second discovery, which would have surprised Maine who had related it with a peculiar American perversion, was that "humour is dependent on cruelty." (696) They were not able to go beyond that, at the time. Before and after this survey the B.B.C. was trying to define more precisely the subject matter and progressively discovered differences in style.

More specifically, everybody seemed to agree that the main obstacle to the free exchange of comedians lay in the difference of speed at which the two audience reacted to the jokes. In 1933 the Radio Times introduced an all-English humourist to its readers and described his Englishness as a lack of speed. "However varied his work has been," the B.B.C. magazine wrote, A. P. Herbert "has remained consciously the beer-and-skittles Englishman, and refused to dally with the quickfire, smart dialogue style of American humour which is being increasingly imitated over here." (697) In a perfect parallel, the New York Sun, reporting the success of American artists working in Britain, explained: "On the whole, Americans seem to be well liked by British listeners, though generally they have to alter their material to some extent in as much as 'fast wisecracking' isn't appreciated over here and humour has to be built to the English pattern." (698)

A report written during the war by an American script-writer who was working with the B.B.C. Variety Department (699) nailed down the pre-war impressions. "If I have noticed one great difference between British and American comedy," he wrote in 1943, "is the slowness of the British joke compared with the American. In many cases the American audience is so far ahead of the comedian that he doesn't have to finish the end of the joke. This has
been demonstrated time and time again, in the Jack Benny show, whereas in Great Britain a joke has to be laid out very carefully and the build-up repeated so that the joke is well defined by the time it goes to the place where it should get a laugh. We used to do the same type of material in America," he went on, "and, while the comedians were ahead of their audiences, still they would do what we would call 'playing down to their audience,' in other words, doing a much simpler type of joke than they were capable of. But some comedians refused to do this, and even though they did not get laughs, they did bright gags ahead of their time, and finally the audience did come up to their standard, and they are now among the most popular comedians in America." (700)

But he made another important point. By the beginning of the war in U.S. radio, he informed his British colleagues, "the trend in comedy is toward situation humour. Jack Benny pioneered this," he explained, "and it has turned out very well ... We have many types of situation shows in addition to Jack Benny's, such as the Aldrich family ... Fibber Margee and Marley ... Like the Jack Benny programme, they bring the situation through these characters consecutively." (701)

While the former characteristic of British comedy (its comparative slowness) does not seem to have changed much through the 1940s and early 1950s, the latter difference highlighted by Block in 1943 had disappeared seven years later, as Gale Pedrick, the man who had introduced the Amateur Hour at the B.B.C., maintained in 1950. "Eventually," he wrote, "the British listener came to grips with the American approach, with its slick friendliness and adroit use of situation. Artists and writers learn to pay more and more attention to 'situation comedy' - in which what happens is often so much funnier than what is said ... The comedians of 1950," he concluded, "must clown against a funny background." (702)

Two years earlier Mass Observation had made a second incursion into the matter. Its results perfected the findings of the 1940 survey which had been a
first attempt towards a definition and description of humour. When, in 1948, Mass Observation repeated the experiment it was able to do it with a more sophisticated approach. The purpose of the survey was this time to identify more specifically "The British Sense of Humour." However, while the researchers could easily find common denominators in the national panel's answers (a high percentage found for instance that anti-climax and incongrous jokes were sure humouristic ingredients) and discovered that no big difference existed between the various regions, or between towns and countryside, they admitted that a definition of a "British" sense of humour might imply more than that. They therefore preferred to express their conclusions on the Britishness of their panel's answers as a matter of relative judgement. "An international survey would be required," they confessed, "to discover whether in fact the British sense of humour differs in all these factors from the sense of humour of other countries." But they tried to go a little further than that and did not stop on the allusion to more complicated matters which would require extensive investigations. Indeed, the very results of their enquiry enabled them to attempt a more self-conscious answer to the question they had asked themselves. The survey had in fact furnished as a plain fact the first indicator of the way to follow to deal with that thorny question. "Certainly," they write, "apart from James Thurber and American film comedians, very few non-British comedians or non-British jokes are mentioned by the panel." A surprising finding given the deluge of American entertainment which had inundated British radio during the war. With all Jack Benny's popularity, with all Bob Hope's professionalism, when they had to talk about humour the British still predominantly evoked their own, local comedians. Furthermore, and here the survey gets unfortunately allusive, "a rough analysis of jokes from overseas does seem to indicate that while the basis of all humour is precisely the same, the method of presentation varies from country to country." (703) While no further indication is given of the elements upon which that rough analysis is based, the indication seems
interesting. And it would seem to constitute a very plausible explanation of the
difficulties, the feeling of distance, the descriptions of differences which
emerged from the experience of British and American broadcasters in the first
thirty years of the history of radio.

Accuracy vs. Sensationalism: The B.B.C. News

In the Fall of 1934 the Radio Times launched a discussion on broadcast news
where comparisons with other national approaches were introduced as a critical
element of evaluation. More precisely, German and American broadcasters were
asked to describe the information policies of their radio services and to
express their beliefs on the matter. Eduard Roderich Dietze, introduced as
"Germany’s Pioneer of Broadcast News Reporting," was given the task of
explaining the Nazi approach. (704) Thus British listeners learnt that the
German broadcasting service always preferred to record the events of the day and
broadcast them at a more suitable time so that those workers who are not able to
listen to the radio all day might "be acquainted with what has been going on
when they get home in the evening." Indeed, Dietze maintained, "it appears
preferable to disappoint the few who have leisure to listen at the actual time
the event takes place ... and offer to the less favoured majority the facilities
for taking part in current but distant events." Side by side with this report
stood the American version which appeared as a sort of counterproposal. Its
author was Caesar Saerchinger, the European Director of C.B.S., who described
actuality broadcasting as the very essence of radio. "Broadcasting," he wrote,
"is the act of distributing sound, of widening the area of audibility for the
benefit of those who cannot be within earshot of the point of origin ... It is a
development of the telephone rather than the gramophone, which aims to overcome
the impediment of time ... The gramophone preserves sounds for the purpose of
future reference and reproduces them at the listener's convenience ... It
sacrifices a certain margin of fidelity to convenience and permanence, just as
the motion picture sacrifices a certain amount of visual fidelity ... for the
same reason. But both of these media also sacrifice something more important ... namely "actuality." Broadcasting, whatever else its shortcomings, retains that element of "actuality," the essential attractiveness of the event itself," at least in America, Saerchinger admitted, where listeners strongly preferred actuality to any kind of recording and electrical transcriptions. "What the gramophone provided in the field of music, the cinema supplied in the realms of drama and news. The public therefore did not look to radio for a duplication of the familiar news-reel; what they expected was the news itself ... or a 'live' reproduction, i.e. a dramatisation of the outstanding events." While the quest for actuality was more than satisfied with the ban on recordings which the networks maintained until after the end of the war, "The March of Time" represented the most remarkable, world-famous answer to the need for dramatisation, Saerchinger went on. And then he concluded: "A public so exacting in the matter of actuality is obviously 'spoiled' for the deferred method of communicating events that the excellent recording methods in use in European broadcasting afford ... Whatever the cause, there is no sign of abatement in the American demand for the 'real thing.'" (705)

Lawrence Gilliam, B.B.C. Director of Features, was given the task of reporting where the B.B.C. stood within the wide spectrum which divided German and American attitudes to actuality broadcasting. Significantly he did not start, as his colleagues had done, with the question of the "events of the day." He admits that the "major forms of actuality broadcasting" described in the previous articles "are the very stuff of radio, the promise and certainty of which send listeners in their thousands to the wireless shops and to the Post Office." However, he adds, the listeners does not "wish to hear the 'real thing' only when it is headline news ... And it is in this very direction that British broadcasting can claim a distinct advance on the American and German systems." The peculiarity of the B.B.C. would therefore lay in its attempts "to mirror the everyday life of the country at the microphone." Indeed, according to Gilliam,
the essence of the British approach to actuality broadcasting is the policy "of making intrinsic programme value rather than topicality the criterion." Once more, in his words one sees the B.B.C. as the real and only reliable interpreter of reality. "When the radio producer can gather his 'actuality' in advance and hear it himself time and again before he puts it on the air, he will be able to produce it, to mould it to the needs of his programme ... He will have to face problems of cutting, of selection, and of adapting 'the real thing' to the requirements of the microphone without damaging its essential virtue of reality." Indeed, he foresees, it will be a tough test for listeners and broadcasters alike. The latter will have "to pick out the essential, the picturesque, and the 'human' thing from a mass of miscellaneous material;" the former will have to accept those new images of his very life. The two then "will be united in an attempt to hold up a mirror to life, to catch the essence and flavour of its innumerable ingredients, to get at the truth and reality of things." (706)

This British peculiarity would be further developed during the war. To the point that Gorham cites it as the most interesting change intervened in British broadcasting since 1939. "Most spectacular," he actually writes, "was the speeding-up of news and first-hand reporting, the latter closely associated with the new mastery of the use of recordings. This skill in using recordings was indeed the B.B.C.'s great contribution to the art of broadcasting, and the one in which it outdistanced American radio ... The B.B.C. did not only use recordings singly, as inserts in a news broadcast; it developed a technique of building them into complete programmes or mingling with live narration, dramatised scenes, music and effects, to give reality a sharper edge than a straight report would have." (707) And the British were not alone in praising their own news programmes. In February 1943 the New York Times published an article with the telling title, "The B.B.C. Documentaries Are Good." Its author was George H. Corey, a writer and director of documentary radio programmes in
the United States who had recently visited Great Britain to help with the B.B.C. North American Service; and had returned with strong convictions as to what U.S. radio could learn from Britain. "While the British have readily acknowledged our skill in presenting comedy over the air, we have been reluctant to admit their superiority in the field of documentary radio, programs that bring, direct to the listener, actual happenings from the scene where they are taking place ... There are many reasons why in the field of documentary radio B.B.C. is ahead of our networks," he maintained, "but ... the chief cause is that our nets are still clinging to certain facets of radio-as-usual, even after a year of warfare. Documentary radio requires the use of recordings; recording of events that cannot be timed to the convenience of a radio network ... The dramatic and exciting incidents of war must be used when and as they occur. The heroes of war must be utilized when and where they are available. Broadcasters can't expect fighting men to arrange their engagements with the enemy to meet broadcasting dates. And so B.B.C. has invested thousands of dollars in recording vans - completely equipped mobile units that travel to the scenes of action, recording the events of war when and as they happen." (708) It would therefore follow that there were instances in which a public service could produce a more advanced, more professional style and could take advantage of the possibilities of the new medium better; and war might furnish the first impulse to improve. Any interpretation of the B.B.C. policy programmes (and very nature) as a product of an imperfectly developed mass society should therefore be measured against these examples.

But there was more in the B.B.C. attitude towards information than a discussion on the use of recordings for documentary radio might account for. There were news, which Gilliam did not talk about, news which John Grierson, the well-known leading figure of the Documentary Movement in Britain, had declared as being the first function of radio. There was then the caution which before the war had infuriated Felix Greene, the Corporation's North American
Representative. There was, strictly linked to that, the effort to avoid not only controversial subjects but also controversy with the printed press. There was, undoubtedly, a lack of initiative. "I want radio to bring me close to the events I cannot see; I want it to give me the word of the eye-witness; I want to feel, like a good citizen, the excitement of national happenings, and I want through radio to be part of them," Grierson had passionately declared before the war. "I want more of them done more adventurously," he added, implicitly criticizing the B.B.C. performance, "I want better commentators for the fights, and I want the news people, when they bring in witnesses from the event, to bring in good ones. Politicians and public men may seem very important people; but when they speak the good old 'bromide,' they do not create urgency; they kill it." (709)

Developments which took place during the war and immediately afterwards would have shown that a change in the direction of a more direct competition with the printed press was more than needed. (710) The B.B.C. news staff however also had a strong point in his favour: the popularity of their daily newscasts even in the traditional, unadventurous form they were conceived in before the war. "Someone has remarked that the 'news' is the Mickey Mouse of the B.B.C.," César Saerchinger, C.B.S. European Director wrote in 1938, "meaning that it is the most popular of all radio programs. It is certainly listened to in all circles of society with almost religious constancy and that it is due both to its unfailing regularity and to the impartiality with which it is edited." (711)

Whether it was seen as a serious hindrance to the development of good broadcast journalism (712) or as the fairest guarantee to good information, the defence of impartiality remained a distinctive feature of the B.B.C. approach to news also after the war, when a partial Americanization took place. Actually, the effort consistently pursued by the British Corporation to distinguish between commentary and news seems particularly significant from the point of view of a general assessment of the impact of American styles on British radio. Broadcasters on either side of the Atlantic repeatedly acknowledged this
peculiarity either praising or criticizing it. In the late 1930s, an eminent U.S. visitor to Great Britain, Morris Gilbert, had written: "With the B.B.C. news is news ... It is distinguished by the absence of commentary or interpretation. Sometimes this is irritating. There are events whose significance a listener would like to understand more clearly." But all in all, "it is better so," much better, he thought, than the American attempts at rendering news more appealing which resulted in an unavoidable distortion of any information value they might hold. (713) Fifteen years later H. Rooney Pelletier then North American Service Organiser, echoed: "I would suggest that, in relation to news, an essential fact is the American emphasis on interpretation of news as against the B.B.C.'s classical insistence on objectivity as exemplified by the 15 minute news bulletin." (714) Also in the early 1950s another member of the N.A.S. staff "without wishing to criticize the Radio Newsreel prepared by the B.B.C." reported that "both Mutual and N.B.C. ... find that the pace is slow, the items too long and wordy and it lacks actuality ... The networks are not interested in eye-witness accounts or dispatches read in the studio, they insist on actuality and slickness of presentation." (715)

Briggs described the changes introduced into the B.B.C.'s News services during the early 1940s as important developments in news reporting techniques. Among them he lists various innovations such as "collecting information through war reporters; increasing the range of 'outside' contacts; introducing recorded insets into News programmes" and "associating comment with fact." These developments, he adds, "pointed rather to the pre-war preoccupation with topicality than followed naturally from what had been the B.B.C.'s policy concerning news before 1939." (716) His conclusion grows out of a diachronical, but perfectly internal, comparison of attitudes and events. When seen against the background of a contrast with American broadcasting however a continuity can be traced back, and the extent of change seems somewhat reduced. So, if it is true, as Gorham also states, that "broadcast news showed no disposition to
revert to its pre-war limitations," (717) it did nevertheless maintain its own distinctive flavour. If a process of Americanization had taken place, then, it was to a limited degree, so limited in fact to wonder whether one can talk of Americanization at all.

"Immense audiences for drama"

Finally, there were the fields of broadcasting in which American influence was either very limited or almost undetectable. The first feature programmes, for instance, were described by many B.B.C. men as a British invention, even if U.S. radio also produced excellent examples of the genre. (718) Drama, in general, had always been considered - Columbia Workshop programmes apart - as a typical B.B.C. specialization, at home and abroad. Indeed, the "notion of a 'national theatre of the air,' providing not only original radio plays, but also adaptations of theatre classics, translations of plays by foreign dramatists, and adaptations of works of literature, was, and has remained, an important part of the philosophy of the B.B.C." (719)

As for the eminent qualities of that production it depends very much on what country's broadcasting programmes is compared with. Thus, on one hand, the B.B.C. drama department failed to produce a significant number of original radio plays. Indeed, the sheer dimensions of the Corporation's drama output required a steady production of plays that original writing for radio could hardly be able to guarantee. Therefore, the B.B.C. drama department continued to rely mainly upon adaptations of stage plays and novels. Comparatively few outstanding authors wrote works purposefully conceived to meet with the characteristics of the medium, in spite of the continuous efforts pursued to encourage them. "It must regretfully be admitted," Gielgud acknowledged in 1948, "that in the field of original radio plays we have failed to discover more than a minimum of first-rate work, and equally to establish any real school of pure dramatists." (720) From this vantage point it can be asserted that, especially if compared with the North German Radio's drama output, "the theatrical and the novel tradition were
dominant in British radio drama faute de mieux." If that comparison is pursued further, then, one finds out that "differences of techniques and pressures of work ... reflect two attitudes towards broadcasting consistently reflected by other differences between the two countries in literature and art. In Germany it is consciously more precious and more particularly regarded; in Britain it is considered more as a product, as part of the output,"(721) a significantly different conclusion from the flattering (for the B.B.C.) evaluations emerging from a comparison with the American experience. Then, in spite of the continuous attempts at establishing high quality productions, such as the ones broadcast by the Third Programme, the B.B.C. drama department's greatest achievement was its popularity more than anything else and "the undergrowth of popular drama which emerged during the war years:" the serials, for instance, or "Mystery" and "Morality" plays (the former as developed by Bridson, the latter by Dorothy L. Sayers). (722)

However, this is only half of the story. When compared with what was going on in U.S. radio, a much more popular kind of comparison, the B.B.C.'s drama production techniques, so poorly regarded by the Germans after the war, appear as rather advanced. Especially after the introduction of the dramatic control panel (723) in 1928 "radio drama took a major step forward." (724) Since then and even after the abandonment of the multiple studio technique, B.B.C. drama increasingly identified itself on one hand with the continuous perfecting of standard and techniques, the emphasis upon rehearsals, the primacy of high quality over adaptability to the listeners' rhythms and need for easy listening. In his elaborated report to the Beveridge Committee based upon a comparative analysis of British and American broadcasting, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe had defended at length the Corporation's achievements in broadcast drama as opposed to the poorer performances of U.S. networks in that field. "The B.B.C. puts the artistic needs of the play first; sponsored broadcasting puts timing first." (725) This was the theme of a long, detailed report summarizing the history of
B.B.C. drama since 1929 which Gielgud wrote in 1948. "I do not think it is too much to say that the comparative freedom of B.B.C. productions from the tyranny of the stop watch, which is accepted as axiomatic by American and Dominion broadcasting organisations, is largely responsible both for the success and the prestige of our dramatic output." (726)

Leaving aside the qualitative judgements which are given of the various national productions, it can be concluded that the overall production of the B.B.C. drama department maintained through the first thirty years of its history a few, outstanding characteristics; the comparatively high percentage of stage and novel adaptations, carefully but rather traditionally produced, the introduction of serial plays or of series of plays (727) and the care undertaken to keep a quantitatively massive production could therefore be identified as peculiarly British nuances of an universal genre.

They should therefore be related with another peculiarity of the B.B.C. radio drama production. Especially since the late 1930s, it fairly steadily enjoyed very high listening figures. (728) After the disappointing result of the first audience research into drama listening rates, increasing attention was devoted to the popularity of the plays in the effort to strike a balance between the minority, but highly creative efforts of the Third Programme, and the straightforward importation of American models. In quantitative terms, this policy succeeded. The Corporation, Lord Simon had complacently stated, has managed to build up "immense audiences for drama." (729) In particular the "Saturday Night Theatre" series of classical plays broadcast on the Home Programme had an average audience of over twelve million in 1948 - and maintained very high figures well into the 1950s. (730) Like the Britishized "English Family Robinson," "Saturday Night Theatre" provides another example of how an originally American invention (the fixed-point system) could be put to work to strengthen what were thought of and often conceived as peculiarly British products.
Leaving aside the music output, which would have entailed a very complex and highly specialized analysis to detect extent and contents of cultural influences, humour (as representative of variety), news and drama constituted altogether a high percentage of the B.B.C. programmes as broadcast before the war by both the National and the Regional Programme and after 1945 by the Home Service and the Light Programme. A qualitative survey on the extent to which models imported from the United States influenced the B.B.C. output has shown how imprecise and misleading it can be to talk of an Americanization in progress but also how intractable a subject matter is the attempt to draw a less fearful picture of the national features of British radio programmes on the basis of the confrontation with U.S. influence. A study of the American policy of the B.B.C. highlights important components of those "natural tastes and preferences, traditions and habits of the British people" which the Corporation fiercely defended, and even more fiercely said it did. It also gives useful information upon the more or less paralizing effect of that defence, its degree of feasibility and reasonableness in a changing, fast growing, internationalizing world. Assuming that the United States were not a synonym for modernity (either universally applicable or despicable) it shows what part of that defence withstood the furious passing of time and what was expression of sheer wishful thinking. What one is left with is slightly more than an impression of fascinating future directions of research and much more less than a solid background upon which to build a few conclusions concerning broadcasting and national identity and the role which American radio played within it in actuality. The suspect is that the clues to a possible disentangling of the problem might lay in some obscure corner of the area stretching between the broadcasters' professional ambience and the political world. (731) It can hardly be a coincidence that in both circles American broadcasting represented all through the period analyzed the single most cited "model."
"We all like to think of ourselves as standards," indulgently explained Raymond Williams in 1961 illustrating the reasons which had led - erroneously, as he thought - to the use of the term "bourgeois culture" to describe the changing way of life of the British working classes in the decade which followed the end of the Second World War. "I am afraid this must be unlearned. The great majority of English working people want only the middle-class material standard and for the rest want to go on being themselves," (732) he maintained. Perhaps not accidentally, these two lines of thought might prove equally suggestive when applied to the different case in the history of cultural and social influences here pursued, the development of the complex relationship which British society maintained with American cultural products between the 1920s and the early 1950s - as it can be read in British broadcasting strategies.

Indeed, the same propensity to think in terms of we-they standards resulted in the image of an American "model" of broadcasting which gained currency in Britain since the early 1920s. The juxtaposition to an equally potentially universal system came indeed to represent the easiest and most popular way in which British broadcasting institutions could be described as a model themselves. (733) In this sense U.S. radio functioned as a catalyst of a British cultural nationalism. The history of that image, of Britain as a non-America, builds up to the awareness that what one is dealing with here is a heavily value-charged terminology. However, if they were not juxtaposed as British cultural politicians claimed they were, the two countries' broadcasting institutions did follow divergent paths through the whole of their history. And the context and content of this divergence highlight the significance, and complexity, of British cultural reactions to American influence. So it was that the examination of sources selected so as to account for that mythical polarity
proved, all the same, meaningful. More precisely, the evidence analyzed in part I of this work showed that within the political world the juxtaposition to the American way of doing things was rather popular in the 1920s, when the B.B.C. was created, and still very strong in the early 1950s, when independent television entered the scene. In various instances it therefore seemed to express a much more solid conviction, or serve a deeper function, than is sometimes assumed. The documentation also suggested that the decision to embark upon a publicly controlled, monopolistic type of broadcasting service suited well the cautious attitude adopted by the major business interests involved (or which might have been involved) in the launching of the service itself. Very soon, the B.B.C. officials would contribute their own version of it, all the deeper in their case as in its more general consequences it entailed a defence of their own professional existence. If the terms of the juxtaposition, as expressed in the sources, should not be taken at their face value— as in Williams' case it was indeed in this political-cultural area that a misleading legitimation of broadcasting policies in terms of the defence of a British peculiarity was first conceived— the divergent path undertaken seemed to fit well the state of the society in general and the prevailing attitudes of the business. This quite tentative picture leads to the second objection raised by Williams.

As the working classes wanted only "the middle-class material standard and for the rest want to go on being themselves," in the early 1950s no less than in the early 1920s the great majority of the British radio audience only wanted to be allowed to listen to any good entertainment no matter what its country of origin was. This did not mean that the public was less aware of being British for that, or that it could not retain a peculiar fondness for the British, or Britishized, kind of programmes. This is at least what one is led to think after having observed the strategies adopted by the B.B.C. to cope with American radio artists, programmes, styles, and techniques. Those strategies were undoubtedly
influenced by a determination to defend British culture against what was often regarded among the British élites as the vulgar influence of American mass culture. Moreover, especially since the late 1930s, they were designed so as not to help dangerous competitors transmitting from the Continent. If the British audience would get too accustomed to hearing U.S. radio entertainment, it was feared, they might easily be induced to switch to those commercial stations which could broadcast American programmes. Ironically, however, at this level, that of radio programme content, American broadcasting did indeed function as a model insofar as it seemed to be able to master universal techniques of entertainment and information which might appeal to people tuning in from beyond U.S. physical borderlines. To an extent it did. No good broadcaster could ever think of neglecting what was going on in its specialized field in the United States if not for other reasons (related to the specific component one dealt with) then because American radio was powerfully audience-oriented - and no good broadcaster can ever disregard methods to captivate the audience. However, for this same reason, every broadcaster had also to adapt that material to the national audience. This is what B.B.C. radio men have been doing more or less intensively, more or less successfully through the first thirty years of broadcasting history in Britain. Only for a couple of years, at the beginning of the war, they seemed to have left this defensive attitude aside. Yet by 1944 a general alarm was given against an excessively uncritical introduction of American items. This whole work of translation, resistance, adaptation, rejection, selective learning puts the very notion of "Americanization" to serious test, (734) at least insofar as radio is concerned. Under this regard, the results of this work would indeed point at an eventual rejection of the term as the emphasis it puts on the U.S. side of the process of influence tends inevitably to conceal the importance of the reactions of those who dealt with it.
In short, the strategies to resist U.S. cultural influences in sound broadcasting before and after the Second World War, entailed a degree of political "manipulation" insofar as they were designed to defend national traditions of mass culture which were being "invented" (735) at the moment. What should not be forgotten, however, is that those "traditions" enjoyed a comparatively considerable success which did suffer periods of crisis but on the whole seems to have served well the changing society into which they were immersed.

A Sequel

In 1975, Francois Bédarida concluded his social history of modern Britain with a rather strong statement on the overall trend of British cultural relations with foreign countries. "In its relations with the outside world," he wrote, "the whole of English society has had to undergo a radical conversion in order to pass from the allure of Victorian supremacy ... to the disappointments and setbacks of the twentieth century. Now it was this process that forced England to become European." (736) Bédarida never mentions sound broadcasting in his reconstruction. His conclusion, however, might provide for a very suggestive background to the picture outlined above. The B.B.C. could indeed be labelled as a "European" kind of broadcasting service, as indeed Americans often designed it. "Europe" would here be identified with a mythical entity resulting from an imprecise summation of different cultural nationalisms, thus providing a further positive side (beyond the determination to defend the national culture as such) of the coin whose negative side would be the decision "to avoid the American chaos" and, one might add, American cultural dominance. Here and there B.B.C. officials hinted at their ideal and factual relationships with European broadcasting services. The whole history of the European Broadcasting Union, and British strategies within it, could be seen within this context. While opening
up alarmingly wide horizons, this line of interpretation might provide for a meaningful British sequel to the story which has been told here.
NOTES

(The following abbreviations have been used:

BBC WAC: British Broadcasting Corporation - Written Archives Centre
CAB: Public Record Office, Cabinet Office
FO: Public Record Office, Foreign Office
HO: Public Record Office, Home Office
LC-MpBRs: Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division
MO-FR: The Tom Harrisson-Mass Observation Archive (File Reports)
NSA: National Sound Archive
Oral History, Columbia: The Oral History Collection, Columbia University, "Radio Pioneers Project"
US-NA: U.S. National Archives.)


(3) The significance and evolution of this tradition within the British élites is skilfully reconstructed in Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, pp. 312-317.

(4) For a sophisticated and well grounded assessment of the role of the B.B.C. as a national institution in this sense, see Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, "Broadcasting and National Unity," Impacts and Influences. Essays on Media Power in the 20th Century, edited by James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate, pp. 157-173, London: Methuen, 1987; and, of the same authors,

(5) For the most recent assessment of the role performed by broadcasting as a model for future media policy plans see *New Media Politics: Comparative Perspectives in Western Europe*, edited for the Euromedia Research Group by Denis McQuail and Karen Siune, London: Sage, 1986 (esp. pp. 44-54).

(6) This is the approach to the European response elaborated by David Ellwood and Adrian Lyttleton on the basis of the Italian case. (See David Ellwood and Adrian Lyttleton, "L’America arriva in Italia. Premessa," special issue of *Quaderni storici* 58 (April 1985), pp. 51-53 which includes essays by Victoria De Grazia, Stephen Gundle and Pier Paolo D’Attorre.)

(7) In 1952 Maurice Gorham, B.B.C. Director of the Light Programme after the war, could still write: "'Where television cannot replace sound radio is in long-distance transmission. Nobody has yet devised a way of making the waves used for television rebound from the upper atmosphere, regularly and reliably, as the waves used for sound broadcasting can be made to do.'" (Maurice Gorham, *Broadcasting and Television since 1900*, London: Andrew Dakers, 1952, p. 251.)

(8) In his four volumes on the history of British broadcasting Briggs repeatedly talks about American broadcasting and the (often negative) importance it acquired both as an institutional model and as a producer of programmes all through the years he deals with. His remarks remain the most
reliable and secure starting point for any specialized analysis of the matter. In a more recent essay Briggs himself offered a critical re-examination of his "History of Broadcasting." (See Asa Briggs, "Problems and Possibilities in the Writing of Broadcasting History," Media, Culture and Society 2 (January 1980), pp. 5-14; where he cites among the five issues which would deserve a more extended treatment "the contrasts between American and British broadcasting.")

(9) See for instance Dick Hebdige, "Towards a Cartography of Taste, 1935-1962," in Popular Culture: Past and Present, pp. 194-218. Hebdige summarizes accurately the terms of the British debate on popular culture and Americanization. "From the 30's to the 60's," he writes, "the debates about popular culture and popular taste tended to revolve, often obsessively, around two key terms: 'Americanization' and the 'levelling down process.'" His analysis however remains confined to a general description of very selected comments which he can easily (and perhaps rightly) label as elitist. His main object is in fact to show how America and Americanization have gradually become mythical beasts on which to wage war and how often commentators who have fought against what they called Americanization were actually trying to preserve a conservative conception of culture. A part from the fact that by confining himself to an assessment of conservative values he fails to see more progressive efforts which were pursued to build up a "British" brand of popular culture, he also does not offer a clear definition of Americanization. Similarly, the recent book by Paul Swann on the history of British cinema (Paul Swann, Hollywood Feature Films in Post-war Britain, London: Croom Helm, 1986), while providing for an interesting collection of primary material, does not help to throw light upon the broader issue which is evoked but left in a state of conceptual confusion.

(10) Meanwhile, current trends in mass communication research, calling for a more complete integration of sociological and communication research approaches, offer a wider theoretical setting to investigations into the field

(11) For a more general, theoretical treatment of the question of national identity as an "agent of modern political discourse" see the definition of "nation" given by José Gil ("Nazione" in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1981, vol. 9, pp. 822-852). Colls and Dood have successfully attempted to give a more specific, historical view of the phenomenon as it revealed itself in British history. Their assumption is that "the obverse of a nation which is insisted upon as solid is a nation feared as fragile. Englishness has had to be constantly reproduced, and the phases of its most intense reproduction - borne as its finest moments - have simultaneously been phases of threat to its existence from within and without." (Robert Colls and Philip Dood, eds., *Englishness. Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, London: Croom Helm, 1986, p.29). They seem however to forget that the medium is the message. They therefore underestimate the autonomous thrusts towards a re-definition of Englishness intrinsic to the nature of the new media of mass communication.

(12) *Impacts and Influences*, p. 143.

(13) Ibid.

(14) As Scannell and Cardiff correctly pointed out, the B.B.C. performed its role of promoter of cultural homogenization within different ideal communities, such as the regions, the nation and the English-speaking empire. (See Scannell and Cardiff, "Broadcasting and the National Unity," p. 157 - a highly interesting study of the programmes of "national identity" offered by the B.B.C. in its early history; to be compared with the earlier work by Paddy Scannell, *Radio Times: The Temporal Arrangements of Broadcasting in the Modern
World," in *Television and Its Audience*, edited by P. Drummond and R. Paterson, London: British Film Institute, 1988.) That effort can be read as a peculiar, historical interpretation of the "key activity" of mass media institutions as described by the mass communication theorists: "the production, reproduction and distribution of knowledge." "This knowledge enables us to make sense of the world, shapes our perceptions of it and contributes to the store of knowledge of the past and the continuity of our present understanding." (MacQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, pp. 51-52. Incidentally, Mauro Wolf describes McQuail's approach to this question as an example of the current convergence of the American and the European schools of communication studies - see Wolf, *Teorie delle comunicazioni di massa*, pp. 12-13). In this sense, the provision of a generic sense of communal identity would be inherent to the very existence of mass media. The more specific question of the defence, or diffusion, of a national identity (linked as it is to the twofold phenomenon of the internationalization/nationalization of culture) so far has not received an equally clear theoretical treatment. Philip Schlesinger however has recently laid the basis for a general, deeply critical approach to the question of national identity (see his informed and perceptive study, Philip Schlesinger, "On National Identity: Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized," *Social Science Information* 26 (1987), pp. 219-264). His conclusion is that the "discourses of the mediologists and cultural politicians" have not produced any "serious conceptual thought" on the subject. He therefore offers an interesting and useful panorama of the most innovative "contributions to social theory and historiography which," he maintains, "begin to provide us with leverage on the profound and far reaching problems entailed in talking about 'national identity.'" His bibliography (ranging from E. Gellner to A. Giddens, and from E. J. Hobsbawm to Michael Kammen) and critical evaluations are most useful. Besides he reaffirms "the centrality of such phrases as 'cultural identity', 'national identity' (and indeed transnational identity' in current discourse on
culture and communication)." Schlesinger had dealt with the same problems as applied to television programmes in Philip Schlesinger, "Any Chance of Fabricating Eurofiction?" Media, Culture and Society 8 (1986), pp. 125-131.


(15) The most useful theories on nationalism for the present study will therefore be closer to the "instrumental" approach as opposed to the "primordial"; in particular I shall deal with nationalism (cultural nationalism) as a process of construction of ideas and of "invention" in the sense illustrated by Hobsbawm. (See Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.) The theoretical hypothesis to be verified will therefore be that cultural nationalism was not an arbitrary idea but it grew out of specific circumstances and long standing intrinsic attitudes to culture and politics. (See John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982; for a more specific approach to mass media, the structural-functionalist theory of action could form the most stimulating framework through which to read the relationship broadcaster/audience within the context of this study, see Wolf, Teorie delle comunicazioni di massa, pp. 60-63.)


(17) Any easy identification of popular (and modern) with American shall therefore be dismissed in line of principle. That interpretation has acquired wide currency over the years. Its basic tenet is that any opposition to Americanization is a fight against modernity, popularization of culture, and, ultimately, cultural democracy; it would then be elitist and conservative.
Understandably, given the popularity of American films in Britain, this approach is particularly widespread in the studies on British cinema.

(18) Curran, Smith and Wingate thus summarize the conclusion of the essay by Scannell and Cardiff. (Impacts and Influences, p. 143.)

(19) The collective work edited by Curran, Smith and Wingate strongly argues in favour of a reopening of the debate and offers a most stimulating approach to the problem. "The editors are not arguing for any single or immutable model," they state. "They do, however, believe that it is no longer acceptable to view the media as autonomous institutions - as, so to speak, free, floating, independent satellites beaming down influences on mass publics. The media need to be relocated in the context of the competing social forces that determine the disposition and trajectory of media influence. The interplay of these social forces decisively shapes the character of media organizations, their evolving technologies, and the symbolic content they transmit. No less important, they also structure the values and predispositions that audiences bring to the media which crucially affect, in turn, the extent to which they are influenced by what they view, listen to and read." (Impacts and Influences, p. 2.) See also Wolf, Teorie delle comunicazioni di massa, pp. 42-43.

(20) Gil, "Nazione."


(24) Ibid., p. 36.

(25) Peter Eckersley, *The Power behind the Microphone*, London: Cape, 1941, p. 51. Eckersley was B.B.C. Chief Engineer between 1922 and 1929, when he was forced to leave the Corporation because he had divorced.

(26) For a fuller and wider discussion on "politics and communication" as "inextricably linked" in the period between 1918 and 1945 see the illuminating essay written in the early 1980s by Pronay. (Nicholas Pronay, "Introduction." In Propaganda, Politics and Film 1918–1945, edited by Nicholas Pronay and D. W. Spring, London: Macmillan 1982, pp.1-19.) An overall history (through the presentation of selected documents) of "how the institutions of broadcasting in Britain were created and developed in a context of public discussion can be found in British Broadcasting, edited by Anthony Smith, Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1974.

(27) The Imperial Wireless Telegraphy Committee's members were: Sir Henry Norman, liberal MP (1910-1923), Chairman, former Assistant Postmaster General; F.J. Brown, Assistant Secretary, Post Office; W.H. Eccles, Professor of Physics and Electrical Engineering; Rear Admiral F.L. Field, Third Sea Lord; Prof. Sir Joseph E. Patavel, Director of the National Physical Laboratory; Sir John Snell, Chief Electricity Committee, James Swinburne; L.B. Turner, Lecturer. The Committee was appointed on 24 November 1919.


(31) On the debate in the United States over commercial-non commercial broadcasting in these early years see Eric Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States: Cultures in Collision. The Interaction of Canadian and*


(34) On Hoover's reform proposals see Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 1: 94-96. That the actual situation in the United States was much more complex than British observers seemed willing to acknowledge is also proved by the discussion on radio advertising at the 1922 American Conference: "The discussion produced a curious discussion on advertising - curious in the light of later
development. The idea of 'ether advertising' was mentioned but with disfavour. One of those who did so was Secretary Hoover, who said: 'It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service to be drowned in advertising chatter.'" (p.96). On the Hoover Conference see also Roberto Grandi, Radio e televisione negli Stati Uniti. Dal telegrafo senza fili ai satelliti, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980, pp. 52-53; and Arthur J. Burrows, The Story of Broadcasting, London: Cassell, 1924, p. 55, for a first-hand description of the importance of American experience at this stage. Burrows was the B.B.C. first Director of Programmes and was then to become the first secretary of the International Broadcasting Union. On the role played by Burrows in the early history of British broadcasting, see Asa Briggs, Mass Entertainment: The Origins of a Modern Industry, Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 1960, pp. 24-25.


(36) 157 H.C. Deb. 5s, c.1956 (August 4, 1922). The quotation is from the Postmaster General's (Mr. Kellaway) report to the Commons on the Conference held at the Post Office with the 24 firms interested in the production of wireless material.

(37) This is the opinion maintained by Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff in "Broadcasting and national unity," in J. Curran - A. Smith - P. Wingate, Impacts and Influences, cit., p.157-173.

(38) See Rosen, Modern Stantors, pp. 47-76.

(39) On the negotiations which preceded January 1923 see Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 1: 91-123.

(40) See FO 371/7314 (1922) on the discussion within the Foreign Office on the manufacturers' request of protection and the messages sent to the U.S. Embassy.

(41) In the early 1930s, 12 and a half per cent of the licences were retained by the Post Office and further large deductions were made by the Exchequer "for
general purposes of State." (Matheson, *Broadcasting*, p. 33). Up to 1963, the financial resources levied through licence fees "kept well ahead of the sums required by the B.B.C. Only in 1963 did the Corporation receive the full licence revenue. Since then it has been involved in a continual battle to push the licence fee up, which amounts for ever-increasing government grants." (The New Priesthood, edited by Joan Bakewell, and Nicholas Garnham, London: Allen Lane, 1970, p. 299.) However, the B.B.C. External Service, set up in the 1930s, were paid through a special grant-in aid conceived as an item in the government budget.

(42) Something similar would happen in Italy two years later, when the ministro delle Comunicazioni of the fascist government encouraged a merger between the firms which were asking to be allowed to start a broadcasting service. (See Antonio Papa, *Storia politica della radio in Italia*, 2 vols., Napoli: Guida, 1978, 1: 20.)

(43) "The eventual plan for the formation of the British Broadcasting Company differed in many respects from the original ideas of the manufacturers who formed it, particularly in the way in which the service was financed. Individual manufacturers were prepared to finance broadcasting so long as they believed that broadcasting might be made profitable. When this was seen to be impossible, they agreed in concert to start broadcasting if it was financed directly by listeners. This was not acceptable to the government and the broadcast listeners licence was seen clearly as a slight form of taxation rather than as payment for a service ... This was not an example of public service by industry, but the means adopted by the Post Office to have a broadcasting service established without cost to itself. It was accepted by the firms because they believed that the sale of receiving sets would be so profitable that the risks involved in financing the Broadcasting Company were worth taking." (Sturmey, *Economic Development of Radio*, 150.)

(44) Cmd. 2599 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1925", chaired by the
Earl of Crawford.

(45) Cmd. 2599, p. 344 ("Appendix II").

(46) Economist, 13 March 1926 (quoted in Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 1: 349); See also Burrows, Story of Broadcasting, p. 56: "the American experience provided a valuable lesson. It showed the dangers which might result in a densely populated country of small area like our own, if the go-as-you-please methods of the U.S. were copied".

(47) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 1: 351. See also the parliamentary debates of 14 July 1926 (198 H.C. Deb. 5s, c473-479); 15 November 1926 (199 H.C. Deb. 5s, c1563-1650) for the feeble liberal opposition.


(49) Interview conducted by Mr. John Freeman, n.d., Oral History Columbia.

(50) Asa Briggs, Governing the B.B.C., London: B.B.C., 1978, p. 3, which investigates in detail functions and characteristics of the members of the B.B.C. Boards of Governors (and of its predecessor, the Board of Directors).

(51) Ibid., p. 17.


both Labourites and Conservatives had come to accept the idea and consistently
defended its implications. For the 19th century backgrounds of this story see
also, by the same author, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform,
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; Dennis Smith, "Englishness and the
Liberal Inheritance after 1886," in Englishness, pp. 254-282; and Clarke,
Liberals. For a history of the setting up of the British Broadcasting
Corporation as part of a larger expansion of the public sector (even in the
years of 'decontrols') see Sidney Checkland, British Public Policy 1776-1939,

(54) Freeden, Liberalism Divided, pp. 87.
(55) See Ibid., pp. 323, 353.
(56) "For the student of government and administration the public corporation
is a particular type of administrative institution which engages in commercial
activities ..., but does so subject to certain constraints set by its position
within the political and administrative system as a whole." (Nevil Johnson,
"The Public Corporation: An Ambiguous Species," in Policy and Politics, edited
(57) W. A. Robson, "The B.B.C. as an institution", Political Quarterly VI
(October-December 1935), p. 469 (or W. A. Robson, Public Enterprise,
Developments in Social Ownership and Control in Great Britain, London: Allen &
Unwin, 1937, p. 74). However, "during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s there had been
few sociologists and no academic specialists in 'communications.' What was said
by academics about broadcasting - its structure and its influence on society -
tended to be said, therefore, by historians and political scientists," (Briggs,
Governing, p. 181) who then just started to perceive and analyse the peculiar
qualities of broadcasting as a mass medium.

(58) Checkland, British Public Policy, p. 335.

(59) "Control by government is as old as the printing press. Control on behalf
of the public, by a body independent of political pressure, is a comparatively
new measure, made necessary by the expanding range and supposed power of the
new media, and possible by the extension of franchise and the broadening of
political participation by ordinary citizens." (E. G. Wedell, Broadcasting and

(60) The term is used by Sidney Head. (See Sidney W. Head, World Broadcasting

(61) Freedon, Liberalism Divided, p. 50. For the evolution of this concept's
contents see also pp. 79, 220, 264, 303, 318, 333.

(62) A much more sophisticated version of similar "nationalistic"
interpretations of political attitudes are to be found in various studies on
British political culture. See for instance Stanley Rothman, "Modernity and
Tradition in Britain," in Studies in British Politics. A Reader in Political

(63) "Manufacturers of radio apparatus seeing the demand for receiving sets
which broadcasting had created in America, were anxious to see such a service
established in England; Metropolitan Vickers, for example, had sent an engineer
to America to study the Westinghouse experience in broadcasting." (Sturmey,
Economic Development of Radio, p. 138.)

(64) On the importance of U.S. direct intervention in British broadcasting
eyearly developments, see Asa Briggs, The B.B.C. The First 50 Years, London:
Oxford University Press, 1985, p.17; by the same author, History of
Broadcasting, 1: 3-24, 59-67; R. H. Coase, British Broadcasting, pp. 8-11;
Maurice Gorham, Broadcasting, p.26; Emily Rosenberg, Spreading the American

(65) In the early 1920s, a pioneering work on the subject maintained that
"ordinary and extensive advertising by radio is either futile or wasteful. If
the radio listener notes a bit of advertising is coming through the air, he can
easily tune it out and turn to something else ... A very little amount of
advertising can, and should, be done by wireless ... Unrestricted advertising
done by private broadcasting, even though it should be successful, would
preempt such a vast proportion of the ether that there would not be room for
other legitimate traffic." (H. L. Jone, The Economics of the Radio Industry,
Dygert, Radio as an Advertising Medium, New York - London - Toronto: Longmans,
1939. In an interview undertaken by Frank B. Hill between November 1950 and
June 1951, Frank Atkinson Arnold, a pioneer in radio advertising in the United
States, stated that up to 1926 "neither my agency nor any other had a definite
interest in radio other than that of curiosity, this was true because there was
no basis on which to interest the national advertiser. There was some
patronizing of local station broadcasts by local advertisers." (Oral History,
Columbia.) Arnold was the author of one of the earliest books on the subject,
(Frank A. Arnold, Broadcast Advertising: the Fourth Dimension, New York: John
Wiley, 1931) as he himself recalled in the same interview: "The book was so
much of a novelty that the Conservative London Times on receipt of a review
copy sent without comment by my publishers, devoted a column and a half on its
editorial page to an extended review of the book with very pertinent references
to the possible value which the B.B.C. might obtain from its reading." (Oral
History, Columbia.) John W. Spalding has offered a perceptive description of
the situation in the 1920s in the United States and elaborated an explanation
for the changes. See John W. Spalding, "1928: Radio Becomes a Mass Advertising

(66) In fact "by 1939 'nine million radio licences had been issued, and radios
were to be found in nine out of 10 homes." (Eric Hopkins, A Social History of
1979), p. 254; see also Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, Britain in the
study on the degree of social pervasiveness of broadcasting in the inter-war
years, Pegg estimates an audience, in 1939, of 33 millions of people; but he adds: "In 1939 the working class was still under-represented in the audience and the residuum was not fully absorbed until the introduction of the 'utility set' in 1944." (Mark Pegg, Broadcasting and Society, pp. 6-16, 48; Pegg gives also detailed figures on the regional distribution of licences.) As Stevenson points out, another factor should also be taken into account to evaluate the extent of the B.B.C. public: "licenses," he writes, "at 10s. for the period 1922-39 were not cheap, and this almost certainly acted as a disincentive to the poorer sections of the community." (John Stevenson, British Society 1914-1945, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984, pp. 408.)

(67) For the manufacturers of radio sets' position, see Sturmey, Economic Development of Radio, p. 150.

(68) "Memorandum to Sir William Noble," September 7, 1922, BBC WAC, CO 47/1.

(69) "Minutes of 26th meeting. Wireless Subcommittee-Imperial Communications Committee," April 26, 1922, CAB 35/9. See also Terence H. O'Brien, British Experiments in Public Ownership and Control, London: Allen & Unwin, 1937, p. 98: the arrangement with the British Broadcasting Company, O'Brien writes, "was undoubtedly influenced by the experience of the broadcasting boom in the United States, which had led to a condition bordering on chaos in that country ... as well as to the production of large surpluses of apparatus which British producers feared might be dumped upon the British market."

(70) Pegg, Broadcasting and Society, p. 49. For a general overview of the relative economic and technical development of British and American radio industry, see Derek H. Aldcroft, and Harry W. Richardson, The British Economy 1870-1939, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 272: "The industry took up many technical improvements in the inter-war years such as automatic volume control, press-button tuning, multiple wave bands, static reducing devices, and better calibration of dials; portable radio sets and car radios were on the market from 1933. As a separately housed unit, the Rice-Kellogg moving coil
loudspeaker was on the British market before it reached the American ... Rapid technological change also showed itself in techniques of production: in the thirties most of the leading set makers adopted line production methods ... On the debit side ... technical advance in receiving sets was faster in America before 1939, and ... much of the progress recorded here was based on communicated American patents."

(71) This was also the reason given by the Foreign Office to the U.S. Embassy to explain "the exclusion of any foreign (wireless) apparatus which may be imported from use in connection with a special broadcasting service which apparently could not be established on a successful financial basis without the imposition of this condition." (Letter, August 19, 1922, FO 371/7314, 1922.) The suggestion to give such an explanation had come from the Secretary of State.

(72) For a concise overview of newspaper circulation in Britain, see John Cunningham, "National Daily newspapers and Their Circulations in the U. K. 1908-1978," Journal of Advertising History 4 (February 1981), pp. 16-18. The aftermath of World War I does not seem to have been particularly encouraging for newspaper proprietors either. See Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, London: Chatto & Windus, 1961, p. 230: "The period [1920-1947] had begun with considerable difficulties for the press ... In the early years of high costs, several newspapers ceased publication, and the mounting cost of the competition for circulation reinforced this tendency." The press attitude was made clear from the very beginning (see 25th meeting of the Wireless Sub-Committee of the Imperial Communications Committee, April 25, 1922, CAB 35/9). It might be interesting to note that, apart from what was happening in the United States, elsewhere in Europe newspaper proprietors participated in (and encouraged) the establishment of broadcasting. This is what happened in Sweden, for instance, see Edward L. Ploman, Broadcasting in Sweden, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, pp. 9-12.
See for instance the report of the second official broadcasting committee, chaired by Major General Frederick Sykes which describes the Press opposition to the use of broadcasting for advertising purposes (as it was the case in the United States and Australia) (Cmd. 1951 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1923," presented to Parliament in August 1923). That this attitude formed part of a scarcely developed entrepreneurial spirit in the economic circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s might be inferred from the fact that once commercial television was allowed in 1954, "much of the investment in the programme companies has been by the existing newspaper combines." (Raymond Williams, *Communications*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 (1st ed., 1962), p.23.)


reporting on a meeting with a manager of J. Walter Thompson, one of the biggest American advertising agencies operating in London, the Director General of the B.B.C. maliciously stated: "his firm have had to duplicate their staff for radio work, are losing money, and hate it." (April 1, 1938, BBC WAC, R34/959.)

(79) "Pressure from advertisers became stronger when, from 1930 onwards, international broadcasting stations were set up in Normandy and Luxembourg which were used by British advertisers who could be heard in Britain." (Blanche B. Elliott, A History of English Advertising, London: Business Publications, 1962, p. 199, where the story is also told of the establishment, in 1930, of a Radio Advertising Defence Society by the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers.) For a superficial overview on the commercial radio which transmitted from the Continent, see Mike Baron, Independent Radio. The Story of Independent Radio in the United Kingdom, Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1975, pp. 9-21. For a more detailed and thorough analysis of Radio Normandie, see Donald R. Browne, "Radio Normandie and the IBC Challenge to the B.B.C. Monopoly," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 5 (1985), pp. 3-18. The complex interests involved in the commercial radio of the 1930s is also testified by the obvious but still interesting favourable attitude towards the strengthening of those stations expressed by the manufacturers of radio sets. (See Pegg, Broadcasting and Society, pp. 50-51.)


(81) A longer and more detailed history of Radio Luxembourg can be found in Walter B. Emery, "Radio Luxembourg: 'The Station of the Stars,'", Journal of Broadcasting IX (Fall 1966), pp. 311-326. See also British Broadcasting, edited
by Smith, pp. 74-75.

(82) See This Is the IBC. London: IBC, 1939; and Thomas, With an Independent Air, pp. 32-44 (on his experience with commercial radios before the war).


(84) See "Advertising over the Air in England," Broadcasting, February 15, 1935: "It's almost safe to say that radio advertising has arrived, at least, in England. At any rate it is arriving in rather large amounts via the back door - in other words, from the other side of the Channel. What's more, American advertisers are breaking into the European market by using continental stations." The U.S. specialized magazine then went on informing its readers (usually people in the trade) that the International Broadcasting Corporation [sic!] ... has now opened an office in Radio City, New York, under the name of Imperial Broadcasting Company." The periodical consistently followed the advances of commercial radio in the British Isles before the war. See also "Radio Luxembourg Records Programs of American Type for Use in Europe," Broadcasting, June 1, 1937.

(85) Plomley, Days Seemed Longer, p. 125.


(87) For a sample of the critiques against the monopolistic structure of British broadcasting, see George E. G. Catlin, "This Giant Air Monopoly," Fortnightly Review 137 (May 1934), pp. 577-585; Ernest Barker "This Age of Broadcasting," Fortnightly Review 138 (1935), pp. 418-429; The Spectator, July 3, 1936.


(89) Title of a paper presented at the 1986 International Television Studies Conference, held in London. (Ian Connell, "In defence of the tyranny of popular
taste: a case for popular broadcasting.

(90) See for instance "Broadcasting in the Democratic State," Round Table 103 (June 1936), pp. 488-502.


(92) Paulu, Television and Radio in the United Kingdom, p. 24. The Selsdon Committee on television was appointed in May 1934 and reported in January 1935. It was followed by the Television Advisory Committee, which, appointed in February 1935, dealt almost exclusively with the television set manufacturers’ request for political support to their exports (in the case of television this meant that the British government would have had to urge foreign governments to adopt transmitters and a line definition which could go with the British technology).

(93) See "Second Meeting Cabinet Committee on Broadcasting," April 23, 1936, CAB/601.

(94) See Sturmey, Economic Development, p. 211.

(95) "Reactions to advertising. An Inquiry by M.O.," December 1938, MO-FR, A 10. As it is common in Mass Observation material, the report specifies very clearly the sample’s limits and the survey’s purposes: "It is widely thought that the attitude of the general public towards advertising is negative. According to this point of view, it is useless to ask direct questions about the effect of an advertisement, because nobody would admit to be influenced by it ... Mass Observation however thought it worthwhile to try the experiment of direct questioning on advertising. Observers were asked to write down their views in answer to straightforward questions ... the sample constituted by the 200 observers who answered these questions is not claimed as a representative cross-section on statistical lines. It is predominantly lower middle class, though well distributed over the population centres of England. Evidence so far collected indicates that in most matters of social habit and attitude, results
from the M.O. sample agree with those collected by statistical sampling methods. The special thing about the M.O. sample is that it consists of people who are willing to set forth their views at considerable length and often with considerable lucidity."

(96) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 350-369. But something seemed to be changing in the attitude of the newspapers' proprietors. In the late 1930s a manager of J. Walter Thompson, one of the biggest American advertising agencies operating in London, told the B.B.C. Director General that "several newspapers" wanted to buy commercial stations transmitting from the Continent, see "Note on DG's Report of Meeting with Rae Smith of J. Walter Thompson," April 1, 1938, BBC WAC, R34/959.

(97) Report on "Radio Invasion in Europe. An Interview with the Organizer and Financier Mr. Leo Y. Chertok," November 16, 1937, BBC WAC, R34/959.


(99) F0 Minute, April 4, 1933, F0 395/496/(1933). In 1944 also the Post Office would recognize that foreign commercial radios had won their battle before the war. See "General Questions Affecting the B.B.C. Memorandum by the Postmaster General," June 5, 1944, CAB 76/16: "the business was obviously highly profitable and by 1938 it appeared that, for better or worse, sponsored programmes in some forms had probably come to stay."

(100) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 367.

(101) Telegram from Alan Whitworth, General Secretary of the Incorporated
notes 266

Society of British Advertisers, to Baldwin, November 1, 1935, BBC WAC, R34/959.


(103) Economist, August 22, 1936.


(105) Paulu, Radio and Television in the United Kingdom, p. 18.


(107) Quoted in Paulu, Television and Radio in the United Kingdom, p. 28.

(108) This is the line of thought followed, for instance, by Edward Liveing, "British Broadcasting and its Role", Fortnightly Review 141 (May 1938), pp. 545-555.


(110) See also B.B.C. Handbook 1931, 131-135, where the "European system" is seen as a consistent solution to the scarcity of resources while America could afford a commercial and competitive system.


(112) Cfr. Scannell and Cardiff, "Serving the Nation." For the fortunes of the idea of education in the political thought, see Freeden, Liberalism Divided, pp. 220, 264-265, 318, 333.

(113) However, as the studies by Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff tend to show, and as it came out rather clearly from Briggs' descriptions, the mixture's composition did change in a specific direction over the years, progressively eliminating, or reducing, the most elitist productions.

(114) Times, August 14, 1934.
According to Reith's biographer, it was American criticism which would have prompted the B.B.C. Director General to write an exhaustive explanation of the values and operations of the corporation, a "full length apologia in defence of British traditions."

("The B.B.C. was run partly according to the principles of modern 1920s management which Reith had discovered during its years in America, and which a number of successful British firms in the private sector had also espoused - also, some, such as the Post Office, in the public sector." (Anthony Smith, "Licences and Liberty: Public Service Broadcasting in Britain," in The B.B.C. and Public Service Broadcasting, edited by Colin MacCabe and Olivia Stewart, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 9.) In 1915-17 Reith had worked in New York as a mechanical engineer to help the British war effort. The son of a presbyterian, "he was so unlike the traditional stereotype of a Briton in the King's uniform that his hosts took Reith to their hearts virtually as one of themselves." (Andrew Boyle, Only the Wind Will Listen. Reith of the B.B.C., London: Hutchinson, 1972, p. 94.)


(118) Ibid., p. 144.

(119) Listener, August 6, 1938. The B.B.C. magazine followed closely, for instance, the progresses of educational broadcasting in the United States; single productions or types of productions which the B.B.C. imported from America will be examined in part II.


(121) See Maurice Gorham, Sound and Fury. Twenty-one Years in the B.B.C.


(123) "Every summer there is one exodus to America," the first radio magazine which appeared in Britain totally independent from the B.B.C. wrote complacently reporting the Corporation attitude to send producers abroad.

(Radio Pictorial, June 7, 1935.)


(125) The basic sources for a picture of B.B.C. staff contacts with America are to be found in the professionals' memories (see for instance D. G. Bridson, Prospero and Ariel. The Rise and Fall of Radio, London: Gollancz, 1971; P. Eckersley, Power; Roger Eckersley, The B.B.C. and All That, London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1946; Val Gielgud, One Year of Grace. A Fragment of Autobiography, London: Longmans, 1950; Harman Grisewood, One Thing at a Time. An Autobiography, London: Hutchinson, 1968; R. S. Lambert, Ariel and All His Quality, London: Gollancz, 1940; Cecil Arthur Lewis, Broadcasting from Within, London: George Newnes, 1924; Matheson, Broadcasting; Eric Maschwitz, No Chip on My Shoulder, London: Jenkins, 1957; Reith, Into the Wind) and in the reports on staff visits abroad held by the BBC WAC (abundant in particular for the years after 1939, see esp. files E15) and the specialized periodicals, such as the Radio Times, Radio Pictorial, Listener. For the very early years, see also Sidney A. Moseley, Who's Who in Broadcasting. A Biographical Record of the Leading Personalities of the Microphone, London: Pittman, 1933.


(128) P. Eckersley, Power, pp. 135, 137.

(129) Radio Times, December 2, 1927.

A recent version of the identification of public service with the British system and of commercial broadcasting with America can be found in *The Politics of Broadcasting*, edited by Raymond Kuhn, London: Croom Helm, 1985, whose introduction to the comparative study of the future destiny of public service broadcasting in different Western countries ends with a drastic juxtaposition: "It seems," writes Kuhn, "that broadcasting systems in other Western countries will increasingly conform to the U.S. commercial model. Reithian values are not dead. Not yet. The media are not American. Not yet. But the omens for public service broadcasting have scarcely looked less favourable."

In fact, David Cardiff has effectively shown how great a part economic considerations played in the devising of the B.B.C. broadcasting policy. See David Cardiff, "Time, Money and Culture: B.B.C. Programme Finances 1927-1939", *Media, Culture and Society* 5 (1983), pp. 373-393. A similar conclusion (of a much more confused relationship between public service and commercial broadcasting than the two terms seem to be able to allow for) could be drawn from the memoirs of a well-known producer who worked both for the B.B.C. and for the continental commercial stations, and after the war for Independent Television. See Thomas, *With An Independent Air*.

*Radio Times*, June 21, 1929.

See Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising*, p. vi: "The rise of broadcast advertising was slow and uncertain until the formation of the first of the great national networks late in 1926 transformed radio into a medium of national proportion. From then on, the use of radio broadcasting for advertising purposes grew with amazing rapidity ... Today there are signs that the industry is beginning to develop form, substance, and guiding principle. A fairly efficient structure is emerging from the chaos which ruled the years of 1929-30, when so called spot-broadcasting first competed with national networks.
... Broadcast advertising is the keystone of the so called 'American system' of broadcasting."

(135) By the late 1920s, "all of the elements that characterize the American system of broadcasting could be found in radio: the alliance of advertisers and commercial broadcasters, who dominated programming over national networks; an oligopoly of manufacturers making radio equipment; a weak, administrative type of federal regulation; and the widespread diffusion of receivers in American homes, where they served increasingly as centers for family life." (Czitrom, Media and American Mind, p.79.) A history of the pressures exercised by various groups in favour of regulation is described in Erwin G. Krasnow, Lawrence D. Longley, and Herbert A. Terry, The Politics of Broadcast Regulation. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978, pp. 10-19.

(136) Rosen, Modern Stantors, p.3.


(138) In a more daring version (which viewed the national traditions as superior as to be universally applicable), the un-American nature of the B.B.C. was to be conceptualized as a "model". As such it could be exported. Even to America, some thought. While discouraged by the Foreign Office and the government, the B.B.C. consistently maintained an obsessive interest in those minority sectors of the American society that would have wished a more or less radical reform of the commercial system.

(139) 425 H.C. Deb. 5s, c1078, July 16, 1946. The Lord President of the
Council, Mr. Herbert Morrison, is speaking.

(140) 352 H.C. Deb. 5s, October 11, 1939, c399. In 1939, a discussion was started by newspapers and journals about the B.B.C. news bulletins, which had been accused of left tendencies and sensationalism. See the Times, February 7 and 25, 1939, commented upon by Kingsley Martin, "Public Opinion and the Wireless," Political Quarterly 10 (June 1939), pp. 280-286; and Round Table 116 (September 1939), pp. 719-732. On the debate see Coase, British Broadcasting, pp. 146-148.


(142) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 193. Gorham was BBC North American Director during the war and Head of the Home Service immediately afterwards.

(143) Ibid.

(144) See Paulu, Television and Radio in the United Kingdom, p. 15. The whole discussion had been anticipated by the B.B.C. itself. In the very early days of the A.F.N. British transmissions, G. Adams, the B.B.C. Director of Programme Planning, wrote to the Controller (Programmes): "It is not unlikely that various parties who are interested in seeing a highly commercialized set-up for British broadcasting after the war may point to the A.F.N. as an example of a normal commercial chain and the programmes it can produce, with accompanying disparagement of B.B.C. output ... I think we should take every step to check up on what number of the civilian population is able to hear these programmes and if the leakage is at all considerable, ask the Americans to reduce the
power or take whatever steps may be appropriate. I am dubious about the wisdom of using Listener Research to this end, although ... the local correspondents might perhaps provide useful data without attracting the limelight on to the Network." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, July 24, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/909/1.) Similarly, when the American Broadcasting Stations in Europe (A.B.S.I.E.), based in Britain and broadcasting to Europe in eighteen languages, went on the air in April 1944, many British newspapers warned their readers that it could as well be the starting point for a new wave of American influence on Europe as, they maintained, the consequences of the establishment of the A.F.N. had demonstrated. See BBC WAC, E1/105/1. For an example on how American broadcasters perceived these developments, see Broadcasting, July 15, 1946.


(147) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 189.

(148) Ibid., p. 194.

(149) See Public Opinion 1935-1944, edited by Cantril and Strunk, p. 713. R.H. Coase reports these data as related to October 1942. (See Coase, British Broadcasting, p. 201.)

(150) A more detailed history of B.B.C. entertainment during the war is given in chapter 5 below.
For a general overview elaborated by an opponent of monopoly of the discussion on broadcasting institutions monopoly during the war see Coase, British Broadcasting, pp. 148-152.

The 1st Earl of Woolton, an economist by training, was a former chairman of the John Lewis Partnership, the big department store modelled on the American enterprises. In 1940 he had entered the Cabinet as Minister of Food, what he remained until 1943, when he was appointed Minister of Reconstruction. It was upon this latter charge that he was involved in the drawing out of a broadcasting policy. Woolton joined the Conservative Party in 1946. For his position within the party and in relation with the campaign for commercial television, see H. H. Wilson, Pressure Group. The Campaign for Commercial Television, London: Secker & Warburg, 1961, pp. 76-77.


War Cabinet Broadcasting Committee, "Broadcasting to Foreign Countries," April 19, 1945, CAB 76/16. Competition with the Soviet Union but also with the United States on propaganda abroad played a part in the determination to keep up to the B.B.C. war performance. See War Cabinet Broadcasting Committee - Draft Report, November 20, 1945, CAB 76/16.

See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 505-541.

It is Raymond Williams who describing the terms of the controversy on means of communication brings in these wider issues: "In one way," he writes, "the basic choice is between control and freedom" (Raymond Williams,

The Foreign Office described the dangers implicit in such a plan in "Memo" by R.A. Gallop: "the acquisition of the station by an American commercial organization" it warned, "would not only provide facilities for boosting American goods in Europe ... by sponsored programmes, but would presumably also permit some arrangements to be made for transmitting officially-inspired broadcasts from time to time," September 4, 1945, HO 256/290.

"Radio Luxembourg. Memorandum by the Minister of State, the Postmaster General and the Minister of Information," [October 1945], CAB 124/400.

In a letter from the Ministry of Information the situation in France as regarding broadcasting was judged alarming: "Apart from the Socialist party ... none of the major parties have any very firm policy in the matter ... The M.R.P. is at present opposed to commercial broadcasting, but this opposition is mainly due to the fact that its present leaders were closely connected with the B.B.C. in London during the German occupation of France and in consequence regard the restriction of broadcasting to a public corporation as desirable," March 22, 1946, HO 256/291. For a brief history of French broadcasting after the war see Miquel, Histoire de la radio, pp. 145-153, where the progressive establishment of a "régime du monopole d'État sans concessions" is described.

"Commercial Broadcasting Overseas. Notes Summarizing a Discussion Held at the Treasury on the 5th April 1946," HO 256/291. The Board of Trade had been trying to promote the advertisers' interests in the face of the monopolistic attitude of the government and had warned against the risk of putting the British entrepreneurs at a disadvantage in comparison with the Americans who could advertise their products in Europe.

See HO 256/294.
This was in fact the main worry of the Foreign Office as shown by the fact that when an agreement was reached with Moscow "for our continued use of the frequency of 167 kc/s" the F.O. decided to "discontinue negotiations for the use of Radio Luxemburg for HMG broadcasts to Europe." ("G.P.O. Memorandum," to the Foreign Office, December 17, 1946, HO 256/294.)


A "Cabinet Memorandum" stated as a priority the use of Radio Luxemburg for the continuation of the broadcasts to Central Europe, August 14, 1946, HO 256/294. The Post Office however saw it differently.

"Case against Commercial Broadcasting to this Country from Abroad," December 6, 1946, HO 256/299. The preparatory notes to the memorandum which was presented to the Postmaster general were even more explicit. See HO 256/348.

Letter to Hugh Dalton, January 8, 1947, HO 256/297. The restrictions were easily avoided, though. British firms wishing to advertise their products through Radio Luxemburg used, for instance, their American subsidiaries. See Broadcasting, August 5, 1946.

"Note of an Informal Meeting to Discuss a Suggested Scheme for the Acquisition of Radio Luxembourg by British Interests," December 14, 1944, CAB 124/406. At this point, the government answered in the negative to the advertisers' request.

From the Board of Trade to the G.P.O., June 15, 1946, CAB 124/407. On the cultural implications of an American intervention, the Board of Trade warned: "If there is no European commercial competition to the BBC, demand for reception of U.S. programmes may well become larger ... Apart from the question of whether or not this would be desirable in itself — and there are those who dislike further Americanisation of this country — the advantage to U.S. manufacturers would be very great."

Anthony Smith, "Licences and liberty: public service broadcasting in
Incidentally, it may be interesting to mention here that the President of the French company which would have controlled Radio Luxembourg after the war, "asked if he contemplated taking any American radio shows 'as is' for his English audiences," answered that "he thought not, because of audience differences. Although he might employ American talent, he thought the programs would have to have a design peculiar to British tastes and for that reason would probably be made in Britain." (Broadcasting, August 5, 1946.) Under this regard, the story of Radio Luxembourg's programmes might add further elements in support of the analysis presented in chapter 7 below.

Letter from Kirk, Director of Communications and Broadcasting Division, Ministry of Information, to Flett, Office of the Lord President of the Council, November 22, 1945, CAB 124/411; where the final answer of the department — a letter from H. Morrison to S. Campbell, dated December 17, 1945 — can also be found.

See NPA leaflet, January 1945, CAB 124/411.

Letter from Col. W.A. Bristow to the Regional Director of Telecommunications, October 22, 1946, HO 256/294.

"Broadcasting after the War. Note by the Minister of Information", July 12, 1944, CAB 76/16.

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the Woolton Committee, July 17, 1944, CAB 76/16.

This opposition, however, was not grounded on matters of principle, at least in the post-Reithian era. Meanwhile the B.B.C. was in fact elaborating a new policy towards advertisement which seems to point at a further intrinsic contradiction. As early as September 1941, when political priorities were dramatically bringing into evidence the importance of the B.B.C. transmissions
to North America (see chapter 4 and 5), the Director of the B.B.C. North American Service was proposing the Ministry of Information to consider the possibility of "offering B.B.C. programmes for commercial sponsorship in the United States." He then organized, as the Ministry proposed, an informal meeting with the biggest advertising agencies operating in Britain and the United States "to discuss how more British radio programmes could be got to the mass audience in the United States."


(181) No real competition was introduced before 1954 (and even then only for television). In this sense, while Briggs is undoubtedly right in stressing the new elements introduced in the debate, it is still continuity rather than change, which emerges as the dominant feature. See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 36-38; if it is true that "it was recognized that the Post Office might at some future date rent programme time to self-supporting stations," it remains out of question that "this line of thought" was "not followed through."

(182) 401 H.C. Deb. 5s, c868, June 29, 1944.

(183) Economist, October 28, 1944.

(184) Economist, November 11, 1944.

(185) Economist, November 18, 1944.

(186) The Economist's articles were also discussed in the Cabinet, see Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 39-40 (where the "signs of a change in parliamentary and public attitudes" are also described, pp. 42-43).


1947, pp. 19-22: commercial operation of FM stations were authorized in the United States in July 1940 but they had not boomed as it was originally expected (owing to problems in the perfectionment of radio sets). A rather complete history of FM radio between 1935 and 1956, "presented in the form of verbatim extracts from official Annual Reports of the Federal Communications Commission" can be found in *Journal of Broadcasting* 5 (Fall 1961), pp. 137-146; 6 (Summer 1962), pp. 209-220; 7 (Fall 1963), pp. 305-322.


(190) Notes of a Discussion Held at the G.P.O. on October 18, 1946, HO 256/14. In spite of these fears, the government seems to have consistently called for the swift exploitation of the new technique. It was urged to do so first of all by the problem of the congestion of wavebands, rendered more acute by the decision to continue transmitting the European Service after the war - thus occupying one medium-wave band which could have been used for domestic broadcasting; and secondly by the ever present threat of U.S. competition in the perfectionment of radio sets (see, for instance, the "Notes on Meeting Held on the 10th December 1946 to Discuss FM Broadcasting," HO 256/14). Up to the early 1950s, however, the shortage of wavelengths could still be called upon to justify in such a small country as Britain, the rigidly monopolistic control of the ether established in 1922. From the technical point of view, the whole process of development of the new technique, as well as its acceptance, still
had to wait for many years to come. Still in November 1951 the B.B.C. Director of Technical Services would have concluded from a visit to the United States: "There is not general agreement on the subject of FM broadcasting even in the States where it has been operated since immediately before the war." (N. Ashbridge, "Visit to the United States and Canada," December 31, 1951, BBC WAC, E15/7.) In 1954 another report on American developments stated: "Many station operators tell you that FM has 'died a horrible death'. In other words, they have lost money on FM ... They might have succeeded but for one thing. The manufacturers did not produce enough receiving sets or push FM sales. Two reasons are given for this failure on the part of the industry. The first is that television came along immediately behind FM and smothered it," the second one is that "monopolistic commercial interests ... feared the widespread competition which an almost unlimited supply of FM channels might have brought about." ("Radio in the U.S.A.," July 6, 1954, BBC WAC, E15/75.)

(191) Briggs stresses the importance of this attack. See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 45.

(192) With at least a notable exception: Ernest Thurtle, junior minister at the Ministry of Information, 1941-45, who dedicates a chapter in his autobiography to elaborate in favour of the introduction of competition. He also evokes the example of the United States to demonstrate, first, that advertising is not necessarily unpopular with listeners, and secondly that competitive broadcasting would give more "vigorous discussion of controversial subjects." (Ernest Thurtle, Time's Winged Chariot, London, 1945; pp. 176-181.)

(193) 425 H.C. Deb. 5s c1074, July 16, 1947. The discussion is described also in Coase, British Broadcasting, pp. 162-167.

(194) Ibid., c1089.

(195) Ibid., c1104.

Its members, who "were chosen not as specialists in broadcasting but as persons of 'broad approach' and 'balanced judgement,'" (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 293) were Lord Beveridge, chairman; A.L. Binns; J. Crawford; Earl of Elgin and Kincardine; Lady Megan Lloyd George; J. Selwyn B. Lloyd; W.F. Oakeshott; J. Reeves; Iar Stedeford; Mary D. Stocks; Stephen J.L. Taylor. The Committee finished its work at the end of 1950. The Report was published in January 1951.


Cmd. 8116 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1949."

Cmd 8116. The alternative models proposed by the B.B.C. critics are summarized in HO 256/69.

Letter from E. N. Nicholson, Office of the Lord President of the Council to Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, December 18, 1948, CAB 124/405. See also the "Memorandum on the Report of the Broadcasting Committee" presented by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Postmaster General in preparation of the draft White Paper, July 1951, where "all the alternatives to the present system" were described as being "open to substantial objections." Therefore, it was stated "the Government are satisfied that they would result in a serious decline in the service to the public." ("Memorandum on the Report of the Broadcasting Committee," Presented by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Postmaster General, July 1951, HO 256/46.)

Economist, April 1, 1950.

Coase, British Broadcasting, p. ix.

Ibid., p. 191.
(206) Ibid., p. 23.

(207) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 299.

(208) "Memo Joint D.G. to All Controllers and Regional Directors on Relay Exchanges," June 19, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/578/1; for the wide discussion on internal competition which preceded and followed this document, see Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 84-137.


(210) "Post-war Programme Set-up. Note by Senior Controller," December 21, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/574.

(211) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 83-116. The discussion revolved around the so-called Coatman plan, from the name of the North Regional Director who saw "'territorial broadcasting ... as a matter of great importance for the future of democracy.'" (Ibid., p. 88.)

(212) Planning Directions Meeting, April 14, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/578/1.

(213) T. O. Beachcroft, "The Post-war Position of the B.B.C. by Assistant Director of Publicity (Overseas)," May 15, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/578/1. Asa Briggs sees these proposals as related to the setting up of alternative programmes after the war. See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 53-54.


(215) Ibid.

(216) The attitude of certain members of the B.B.C. towards advertising does not seem to me, as Briggs maintains, a 'concession.' Some, perhaps not the majority nor the most influential, might as well have been in favour of the introduction of advertising as a beneficial source of income. See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 53.

(217) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 53.

(218) N.A.D. Meeting, January 25, 1944, BBC WAC, E1/210/1.

1949, BBC WAC, E1/291/2. See also Frank Gilliard's report on "Radio in the U.S.A.:" "America is a country of strong and healthy regional and local pride," he wrote. "This vigorous interest in the life and affairs of region, state, city and town is on the whole not well served by commercial radio. The powerful area transmitters of provincial network affiliates are ready enough to cash in on the interest value of easily provided material such as news and sport, but their work is superficial and they contribute little to the sustenance and nourishment of the deeper culture of a region." (July 6, 1954, BBC WAC, E15/75.)


(221) Leonard Miall, the first BBC American correspondent, confirmed that it was a sort of invasion. (L. Miall, interview, August 12, 1987.) See also BBC WAC, E15 files.

(222) Ibid., p. 374. Cardiff reviews the recent debate which seems to point at a fruitful critical examination of the concept of public service. To his very useful bibliography, the book by MacCabe and Stewart should be added (Colin MacCabe-Olivia Stewart (eds.), The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986 (esp. "Introduction").


(224) Simon of Wythenshawe, BBC from Within, p. 61.


(227) Quoted in Coase, British Broadcasting, p. 151.

(228) Cmd. 8116. See also the parliamentary debate on the Broadcasting Committee report. (490 H.C. Deb. 5s, c1423-1541, July 19, 1951.)
These data were reported to the Television Advisory Committee in 1952. See HO 256/210.

See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 372-422.


Letter, January 18, 1951, HO 256/213. This attitude was reflected in the draft memorandum on television prepared by a member of the Central Economic Planning Staff, Edgard Jones, the following month: "We cannot afford to allow consumers' demand to eat into diminishing supplies of equipment of the very first importance for the defence of the country." (February 6, 1951, HO 256/214.) The Ministry of Supply tried to resist this policy and urged for an expansion. In the "Third Report from the Select Committee on Estimates, Session 1950-51. Rearmament" (HMSO: London, 1951) A.F. Dobbie-Bateman, Undersecretary (Finance) of the Ministry of Supply demonstrated that an interruption in the B.B.C. television development programme would not have any consequence on rearmament expenses.

These were the data given in a joint memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Postmaster General, drafted in November 1952, HO 256/218. The American figure was sharply undervaluated. In a letter from D. A. L. Wade, Telecommunications Attaché of the British Embassy in Washington, the percentage of population within range of television in the United States is set at approximately 63%. Even this indication was uncertain, though, as Wade states: "It is an interesting commentary on the outlook on broadcasting in the U.S.A. that when I telephoned to the Federal Communications Commission they were unable to give me a figure, for the simple reason that they have never bothered to calculate the percentage of total population covered ... Enquiries from two of the leading broadcasting journals published in Washington similarly resulted in the reply 'We have never estimated.' I therefore fell back on the only total
population percentages figures I have ever seen which were published in a series of ... articles in the New York Times in July 1951, which quoted the television coverage ... as 62% of the total population ... Since the 'unfreeze' order of July, 1952, a few new stations have gone into operation ... Allowing for these I have calculated that the New York Times figures would now be 63% whether this figure represents primary or secondary coverage I have no means of telling." Meanwhile, a F.C.C. engineer calculated that after the 'unfreeze' that percentage could have gone up to as much as 95 to 97% (Letter to the G.P.O., November 28, 1952, HO 256/218.)


(238) "General Survey of Television" (drawn up in the Ministry of Information), December 1, 1945, HO 256/29.

(239) "Television. Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council" [September 1945], CAB 124/400.

(240) The same were doing the American manufacturers: "it may ... be of interest to review the position in the U.S.A., which is in some aspects similar to our own," stated a Ministry of Information official, there, he reported, "two points of view emerge. On the one side R.C.A. ... strongly advocate a rapid extension of this pre-war 525 line standard in order to get production going on as quickly as possible, while C.B.S. are inspiring articles in the press warning the public that any sets they buy now are likely to become obsolete quickly and promising higher definition with colour in the near future." ("Television. Arguments for and against Resumption and Extension of 1939 Standard," from Kirk (MoI) to D.G., December 4, 1945, HO 258/29.)

(241) See HO 258/1. The Television Advisory Committee's Ninth Report of December 1938 had explicitly considered the question of the introduction of
sponsoring. Meanwhile, U.S. industry was increasingly perceived as leading the sector which Britain had so proudly thought it dominated no more than three years earlier. See also Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 4: 181. For a history of the early development of television in Britain see also Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation. Television and Politics, 1936-1976*. London: Bodley Head, 1977.


(243) See Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 4: 183. However, the Committee "failed to reach unanimity on certain questions before the Coalition Government broke up and their report was never, therefore, submitted to the Cabinet." (Hankey Committee Minute, August 29, 1945, CAB 78/37.)

(244) Up to September 1949 the Committee was chaired by C. Garro Jones, 1st Baron Trefgarne, journalist and politician, Labour MP between 1935 and 1945 (but later joined the Liberal party). William Coates succeeded him in the chair.

(245) The Television Advisory Committee carried on the discussion on line definition, see HO 256/32, HO 258/4, HO 258/6, HO 258/8, HO 258/9, HO 258/10 where the question of exporting television sets outside Britain in competition with U.S. manufacturers is examined. The Committee also collected information on technical developments in VHF (HO 256/181). In 1952-53 it was heavily criticized by the Labour party which thought that business interests were over-represented within the Committee. Their immediate interest in the launching of commercial television, the Labour party argued, was too strong for them to be allowed to have a say in political decisions. See HO 256/207.


(250) "Crucial to the eventual success of the campaign was the fact that individuals from two to three of the larger agencies (such as J. Walter Thompson and S. H. Benson) organized themselves to give a better understanding of the different ways in which television advertising could be introduced." (Ibid.)

(251) Minutes of the 12th meeting of the T.A.C., September 9, 1946, HO 258/4.

(252) Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the T.A.C., January 13, 1947, HO 258/5.


(254) Third Report of the T.A.C., December 17, 1946, HO 258/31. For the ensuing discussion within the cabinet see CAB 124/41.

(255) "Note by Lord Trefgarne on Television Policy" to Postmaster General, December 1, 1947, HO 258/31.

(256) Broadcasting Committee Paper n. 27 "Broadcasting in the United States and Canada," HO 256/2. On the catching up of American television see the letter from Norman Collins, Controller, TV, to the B.B.C. Director General, May 6, 1948, TB/88/1.
See for instance Mr. Charles Ian Orr-Ewing on the Beveridge Report in H.C. Deb. 5s, c1498, 1519-1521: "The greatest obstacle" to the aim of keeping pace with American television, he stated, "is the tightness of money. Surely, in order to obtain these programmes we should allow some sponsored programmes ... I know there is a serious worry" he added, evoking the traditional anti-American fears, "as to whether the advertising content would begin to lower the standard of programmes. But this is something of which our great Dominions have had experience."

See Cmd. 8116 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1949," Appendix G (Lloyd attaches a sample of radio concerts broadcasts from a New York station and an analysis of the programmes broadcast by a number of networks in a week); see also Broadcasting Committee Paper n. 317, "Broadcasting in the U.S.A.," HO 256/9. For Lloyd's position on American broadcasting in general see also H.C. Deb. 5s, 19.7.1951, c1495-1498.

Report for the Director General on the Attitude of the U.S. Independent Stations as to their Immediate Future, with Special Reference to the Emergence of Television, and to B.B.C. Contributions," December 6, 1948, BBC WAC, E15/136.

See "Speech by Mr. H. Morrison," September 28, 1949, HO 256/32.


502 H.C. Deb. 5s, c221 (11.6.1952). See also the article by Norman Collins, a prominent figure of the pro-commercial television campaign, former B.B.C. Controller, Television, published in 1952 and quoted in Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 887: "In an immediate reply to an article by Lord Simon in the Times in September 1952, Collins doubted whether American television was 'bad' because it was 'commercial' pointing out that it was not only in the field of television that American standards are different from those in Britain. No one in Britain, he claimed, was advocating commercial radio and television on the American pattern."


(265) 502 H.C. Deb 5s, 11.6.1952, c222.

(266) "Broadcasting: Some Counter-Arguments against Those who Uphold the Monopoly," May 1952, HO 256/209.

(267) See for instance H. Morrison, 502 H.C. Deb. 5s, June 11, 1952, c248-249; Christopher Mayhew, *Ibid.*, June 23, 1952, c1954 and 513 H.C. Deb, c1467: "The viewer wants the programmes to be in British taste and in British style; the sponsor does not want a British-type programme. The sponsor wants a television programme which, when it is recorded, will sell well in the United States of America ... It means that from the point of view of the sponsors the test of a programme becomes whether it will suit the American market when it is recorded."

(268) 502 H.C. Deb. 5s, June 11, 1952, c307.


(270) 522 H.C. Deb. 5s, December 14, 1953, c46.

(271) The B.B.C. response to American influence on radio programmes will be analyzed in detail in part II.

(272) The B.B.C. was following closely American achievements in television techniques and programmes; see for instance the periodical bulletins on "American Television News", 1950-1951; "Report on American Television as seen in New York and Washington, 14th May-14th June 1951," by Cecil McGivern (who stated: "American TV is in some very important aspects is superior to British


(274) Ibid.

(275) See Cmd. 9005, which Briggs describes as a "typically British approach to this new problem." (Ibid., p. 919.)

(276) Sendall, Independent Television, 1: 51. The programme contractors subsequently urged the Authority to establish a quota. Their pressure materialized in a "Gentlemen's Agreement," which was never published but consistently renewed, which established that "The use of foreign filmed programmes should on the average not exceed seven hours a week" - a figure "to be related to a total programme output of fifty regular hours' broadcasting a week." (Ibid., pp. 108-109.)

(277) Gerald Beadle, Director of B.B.C. Television between 1956 and 1961, writes of the potential use of "canned television" in Britain: "I have always been very much concerned about this world wide traffic in television entertainment: Its products are of only limited importance to the B.B.C. as an exhibitor [B.B.C. 10%, I.T.V. 14%], but the making and supplying of such material to other countries seemed to me to be something which the British film industry ought to be doing. While Hollywood will always have the lion's share of the trade, there seems every reason for Britain to make a bid for its own share." (Gerald Beadle, Television. A Critical Survey, London: Allen & Unwin,
1963, p. 123.) The exporting efforts of B.B.C. television cannot be explored here. The preparations which preceded the launching of the B.B.C. Overseas Television Service (strictly linked to the Coronation programme) will be discussed in a later work.

(278) "Address on Independent Television in Britain by Sir Robert Fraser, D.G. of the I.T.A.," March 10-12, 1958, BBC WAC, R34/1150. For a history of independent television in Britain, see also (apart from the studies already cited) British Television Advertising. The First Thirty Years, edited by Bernard Henry, London: Century Bentham, 1986 (where the caution of the supporters of commercial television is explicitly linked with the uncertain economic and political climate in which Independent Television was created - up to 1956 the companies worked at a loss); Bakewell and Garnham, New Priesthood; Thomas, With an Independent Air, pp. 148-187. For a general comparison, see Robert P. Crawford, "Comparative Aspects of British and American Commercial Television," Journal of Broadcasting, 10 (Spring 1966), pp. 103-110.

(279) In an inspired, energetic and far-sighted book on radio advertising published in 1931 Orrin E. Dunlop states: "Radio broadcasting in America has reached goals not achieved elsewhere on the globe ... The premier position of broadcasting in the U.S. ... is attributed to three main factors which are outlined as follows: rapid adaptation of radio to public demands, freedom from governmental interference with programs, a sound and sensible financial structure, which advertising has helped to build." (Orrin E. Dunlop, Radio in Advertising, New York-London: Harper & brothers, 1931, p. 228.) The degree of democracy enjoyed by the two systems could in fact be analysed from different perspectives which should measure the comparative weight of governmental interference; or try to find a positive conclusion to the neverending debate on freedom of expression guaranteed by private money, on one side, and impartiality legitimized by a publicly supported independent institution, on the other ("Within democracies," Sir William Haley wrote when he was Director
General of the B.B.C., "the first political requirements of broadcasting is that it shall be impartial." (W. J. Haley, The Responsibilities of Broadcasting, London: B.B.C., 1948, p. 4.) This line of enquiry does not seem very fruitful, though, as it would confine the analysis to a very political area where values and lines of action would be very abstractly defined and therefore hard to assess. The discussion on those wider implications is referred to in the first two chapters. The following pages will deal with a more specific subject matter: the relationship with the audience as a peculiar mass communication problem.


(281) Supplement to The Listener, January 31, 1934.

(282) For an extensive explanation of the "public service" characteristics of the American system, see Thomas Porter Robinson, Radio Networks and the Federal Government, New York: Columbia University Press, 1943. "Since the broadcasting company is to be organized," Robinson explains, "on the basis of rendering a public service commensurate to its financial ability to do so, it is conceivable that plans may be devised by it whereby it will receive public support, and, in fact, there may even appear on the horizon a public benefactor, who will be willing to contribute a large sum in the form of an endowment." (p. 24) The book argues in favour of a moderate reform of the system.

(283) Furthermore, while an overall positive conclusion could hardly be reached over the extent to which innovations in the broadcasting service were superseded by audience research in this early period, an investigation into the matter might provide some clues so as to determine the popularity of American
(or Americanized) programmes (see chapters 4 and 5).

(284) See J. C. W. Reith, *Broadcast over Britain*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924. "It is occasionally represented to us," Reith wrote, "that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need, and not what they want, but few know what they want, and very few what they need ... Better to overestimate the mentality of the public than to underestimate it." (p. 37) On Reith's opinions over audience research, see Scannell and Cardiff, "Serving the Nation," p. 163.

(285) With one exception: the department which produced broadcasts to schools asked for some kind of investigation into the effectiveness of school broadcasts as early as 1927. See Gorham, *Broadcasting*, p. 148.


(287) In this sense, the interpretation which Wedell gave of the nature of audience research would seem at least partially correct: "The development of techniques for ascertaining the size and characteristics of broadcasting audiences and the extent of their appreciation of programmes is not, as is sometimes suggested, 'one of the fruits of competition' ... Haunted by the possibility that they might be talking into a vacuum it was, and is, essential to the broadcasters' self-confidence to know that there actually are people at the receiving end." (E.G. Wedell, *Broadcasting and Public Policy*, London: Michael Joseph, 1968, p. 233.) This would certainly apply, for instance, to Gielgud, whose interest in the development of audience measuring techniques had nothing to do with competitive considerations. However, it is significant that the B.B.C. senior staff eventually accepted the idea in a moment in which it was threatened by the expanding influence of the continental stations, as Wedell himself acknowledges (p. 235): "There is no doubt," he writes, "that the arrival of competition increased the importance of audience research, and particularly of its quantitative aspect."
(289) Gorham, *Broadcasting*, pp. 147-148, 149. "In the course of years," Gorham
specifies, "numerous conceptions had been evolved about the different type of
listeners and their different tastes, and these were the basis of 'vertical
planning' (which meant arranging programmes on one wavelength so that anybody
who listened only on that wavelength should in course of time hear all sorts of
programmes) and 'programme contrast' (which meant that listeners who tuned from
National to Regional should not hear the same sort of programme at the same
time). But these conceptions of types of listener and types of programme were
all subjective, very often sensible but not based on any known facts." (pp.
147-148.) See also Supplement to the *Listener*, January 31, 1934.

(290) Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, p. 98. Pegg devotes a whole section of
his book to the Reithian vision of what the B.B.C. relationship with its
audience ought to be and to the introduction of listener research (see pp. 93-
146).


(292) Interview, March 1976, see Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, p. 99. See
Allen & Unwin, 1974, pp. 28-31; and chapter 1 above.

(293) For a sketchy but complete history of the early developments of audience
research, see the "Listener Research Guide" compiled by the B.B.C. staff after
the establishment of the audience research department, "Listener Research
Guide", n.d. [1936], n.s. BBC WAC, R34/23/1; see also Briggs, *History of
Broadcasting*, 2: 256-269; Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, pp. 100-109; Chaney,
"Audience Research and the B.B.C.," pp. 265-268. In an internal memo written in
May 1930, Gielgud describes the main systems employed by the broadcasting
organization of foreign countries and mentions as "ventures ... that are worth
consideration," "the German test of Berlin region, the Danish Post Office's
plebiscite, and what is called the Starch Report, which is a test made by the
sampling methods over the whole of the United States." (B.B.C. Internal
Circulating Memo, May 15, 1930, BBC WAC R44/23/1.)


(296) *Listener*, August 13, 1930.


(299) See chapter 1 on the transformations of the late 1930s. "Given the increase in the size of the audience and the "output" of programmes, more careful attention to the problems described by both Gielgud and Siepmann was ultimately necessary ... The obvious preference of a large number of B.B.C. listeners for the continental commercial programmes added a sense of urgency to the quest for information, yet at the same time made those people who were afraid of research reluctant to have their worst fears confirmed." (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 2: 261-262). For a broader contextualization see also Chaney, "Audience Research and the B.B.C.,” pp. 259-277.


(302) "The RMA consistently pressed for brighter programmes from the B.B.C., hoping that this would increase sales among the relatively untapped working class audience.” (Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, p. 50.)


For Tallent's memoranda and proposals on listener research, see Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 2: 267-269.

Lambert, Ariel, p. 178. Lambert, who defined his cultural background as "liberal, or, rather, radical," had been editor of the *Listener* between 1929 and 1939. He sued a B.B.C. Governor who had tried to fire him and won the case (the famous Lambert vs. Levita, or the "Talking Mongoose", case).

In fact, the continental stations employed American firms such as Gallup and Crossley to measure their audience (see chapter 2 above). Interestingly, their data coincided with the figures offered by the B.B.C. after 1936.


Letter from Maurice A. Gorham to Cruikshank (Ministry of Information), 8.9.1941 (INF 1/176A).


"Briefly, they are: (1) To build up a corpus of information on the basic tastes and habits of the listening public. (2) To measure the quantity of listening hour by hour. (3) To assess the reactions of listeners to individual programs. (4) To assess the reactions of listeners to the broad principles of B.B.C. policy. (5) To supply a continuous stream of information on the public attitude to problems with which broadcasting should deal."

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

"Although ... listener research no longer relies exclusively upon voluntary co-operation," Silvey wrote in 1942, "this does still play a vital part in British radio research." (Ibid., p. 153.)

Ibid., p. 154.

Ibid., p. 156.
(316) Ibid., p. 170.

(317) Ibid.

(318) "Radio programmes for the United States", report of the meeting, 8.10.1941 (INF 1/176A).

(319) Ibid., p. 77.

(320) Quoted in Silvey, Who's Listening?, p. 85. For the original B.B.C. internal correspondence see BBC WAC, E15/200.

(321) Listener, May 11, 1939.

(322) R. Silvey to Controller (Programmes), "Visit to the U.S.A.," May 1, 1939, BBC WAC, E15/200.


(325) Ibid.

(326) Ibid.

(327) Silvey, Who's Listening?, p. 130.

(328) Ibid.


(330) Silvey, "Radio Audience Research in Great Britain."

(331) Ibid., p. 151.


(333) Ibid.
(334) Ibid.

(335) Ibid.

(336) Gorham, *Broadcasting*, p. 222. "The Third Programme," Gorham also recalls, "was not involved in the struggle; the B.B.C. was satisfied with its prestige value and the way it canalised the requirements of cultured listeners, who are often politically influential, and was happy to run it although its average audience was well below one per cent." (Ibid.)

(337) Board of Management Meeting, October 17, 1949, BBC WAC, R19/15/2, where all the document related to this discussion are filed.

(338) "Report by Mr. R. A. Rendall," December 29, 1950, BBC WAC, R34/323.

(339) Ibid.

(340) Home Sound Broadcasting Committee Minute, November 11, 1952, BBC WAC, R19/15/2, from which are taken also the following quotations. For a description of the B.B.C. Audience Research Department in the early 1950s, see Burton Paulu, "Audiences for Broadcasting in Britain and America," *Journalism Quarterly*, 32 (1955), pp. 329-334. "For the most part the reports of the Audience Research Department are distributed only within the B.B.C. This restrictive policy is justified principally on the grounds that an individual program rating is not meaningful unless interpreted in the light of certain knowledge usually applied only by professionals ... The Corporation also has claimed that the publication of these data might subject it to pressure to popularize its programs at the expense of serious offerings for minority groups." (p. 331.)


(342) "These shifts toward more popular radio were accomplished with enthusiasm in some quarters and with reluctant distaste in others. But they were in the end unstoppable." (Ibid.)


(344) Smith, "Licences and Liberty," p. 2 (the underlinings are mine). Smith
goes on: "In Britain the instinct for monopoly runs very deep, certainly within
the whole culture of broadcasting ... Any proposal for introducing a measure of
financial competition has always been turned down." The situation, Smith then
explains, is different when one turns to competition for audience which has
been "fierce" since the very appearance of Independent Television in 1954.
(345) Silvey, "Radio Audience Research in Great Britain," p. 153. It is not
clear, however, whether in this particular case the hypothesis worked out by
Silvey and his staff over the representativeness of volunteers would hold true:
some kind of positive feelings towards the B.B.C. would seem to be a
precondition to the spontaneous offers of the volunteers.
(346) See for instance the debate at the 1986 International Television Studies
Conference; McCabe and Stewart, eds., B.B.C. and Public Service, pp. vii-viii.
For the current evolution of the debate on "public service" broadcasting in
Britain see Media Culture and Society 11 (1989), special issue on "Broadcasting
and the Public Sphere."
(347) Listener, January 31, 1934.
(348) See Radio Times, December 14, 1923. Briggs lists among the issues which
made for international discussions and agreement among broadcasting
organizations of different countries, along with the allocation of wave
lengths, the problems of copyright and exchanges of technical know-how, the
"recognition that although broadcasting systems were national, part of the
radio audience was international. There were possibilities of sharing 'the
ether' in the interests of the listener." (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 1:
308-309.) The present chapter deals with the Anglo-American part of that
international scenario, its technical pre-conditions, its privileged channels,
and the obstacles which were put on its way by the British.
(349) Radio Times, January 11, 1924. In March it was even (unsuccessfully)
attempted to broadcast from California to Great Britain. That serious technical
problems still waited for a solution was publicly made clear by Peter
Eckersley, then B.B.C. Chief Engineer. (See Radio Times, January 25, 1924.)


(351) Apart from considering the use of recordings as a spurious element which contaminated the very nature of broadcasting (identified with live transmissions) the U.S. networks feared it could embitter competition with local stations and render less effective copyright regulations. They therefore maintained their ban on recorded programmes to the mid-Forties. See Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 1: 247 - where the story is told of the first message of the King of England broadcast to the United States: "On January 21 [1925], at noon London time, the voice of King George V was heard by American listeners welcoming the delegates [to the London naval conference]. It was 7 a.m. in New York, 4 a.m. in California. American network practice barred use of recordings for later broadcast as a 'sort of hoax ... on the listener' although the British Broadcasting Corporation already used recordings for this purpose." - and 2: 109, 163-164. Better suited to the B.B.C. philosophy of reasoned and counter-checked information, in Britain recording techniques were developed much sooner. The establishment in 1932 of the B.B.C. Empire Service encouraged even further their adoption. See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 381-382. For the implications in terms of divergent attitudes towards broadcasting see chapter 6.

(352) Radio Times, May 1, 1925. The B.B.C. regularly complained that the charges imposed by the Post Office for broadcasting to and from the United States were too high. See BBC WAC file "Relays - Transatlantic Circuit Charges."

(353) Meanwhile, relays from European countries were on the increase. See Radio Times, January 8, 1926 where a "Europe's radio unity" is theorized: "certainly there are differences (for instance in the attitude of different communities to the educative type of talk)," the article admitted, "but these are small in comparison with the fact - for men and women of the war period, the startling
fact — of a broad similarity in the specific likes and dislikes of nearly 300 millions Europeans." Transmissions from France were almost as old as transatlantic transmissions. In the late 1920s exchanges programmes were also carried out with Sweden and Germany. See Radio Times, February 17, 1928.

(354) Radio Times, April 30, 1926.

(355) Radio Times, November 5, 1926. Figures on listeners' correspondence are to be found in "Notes on Summary of Special Programmes in the Year 1926," February 15, 1927: the two American programmes received 124 letters (a jazz vs. classic music performed by famous bands and orchestras could then get as much as 825, certain operatic productions, 8). (BBC WAC, R34/323.)

(356) Radio Times, November 26, 1926.

(357) See Radio Times, November 5, 1926. Lucas appeared in the "Star Variety Programme."

(358) From C.B.S. New York, August 3, 1931, US-Na, GP 811.7665/1. A quick glance at the various volumes of the B.B.C. Programme Record confirms that relays from America to Britain increased substantially since 1930.

(359) Ibid.

(360) Information on the programme had been made available to the B.B.C. and all main British newspapers by Mr. Masius of the Lord & Thomas & Logan Ltd. Advertising, advertising managers for R.C.A.O. (Radio Corporation of America Overseas.) (See BBC WAC, file "Relays. Amos and Andy broadcasts 1930-1937.")


(363) On July 30, 1930 it was "definitely decided to try and arrange" the Amos and Andy broadcast. Gielgud, B.B.C. Productions Director, negotiated with N.B.C. He stated that the B.B.C. wanted "to take the broadcast on condition 1) that no mention was made of Pepsodent 2) that we incurred no expense beyond
payment for radio telephone 3) that we saw the script in advance for censorship purposes." All that was done except that N.B.C., "after considerable argument, insisted on paying circuit charges." See the memorandum describing the various phases which preceded the New Year's Eve programme, BBC WAC, file "Relays. Amos and Andy broadcasts 1930-1937."

(364) It was broadcast between 7 and 7.15 p.m. every weekday evening.

(365) Radio Times, July 18, 1930.

(366) Radio Times, December 5, 1930.

(367) Quoted in This Fabulous Century, p. 30. Linda Christensen has first brought this quotation to my attention.

(368) Radio Times, July 14, 1933.

(369) Script, December 31, 1930, BBC WAC, file "Relays. Amos and Andy broadcasts 1930-1937."

(370) Ibid.

(371) Ibid.

(372) Letter to J. W. Elwood, Vice-President of N.B.C., January 6, 1931, BBC WAC, file "Relays. Amos and Andy broadcasts 1930-1937."

(373) Radio Times, January 16, 1931. The B.B.C. broadcast another episode of "Amos 'n' Andy" when "Andy" (Charles Correll) was in London and "Amos" (Freeman Gosden) in California on August 20, 1934, but much later at night (between 12 midnight and 12.15 a.m.).

(374) Radio Times, December 5, 1930.

(375) Radio Times, March 20, 1931.

(376) Broadcast in August 1936.

(377) See BBC WAC, file "Relays. C.B.S. Regular Cooperative Exchange 1931."

(378) April 14, 1932, BBC WAC, "Relays. Exchanges with U.S.A. 1932-1938." See also BBC WAC "Relays. C.B.S.: Regular Cooperative Exchange, 1931" and the Radio Times, April 14, 1932. The emphasis here will be put upon the "characteristic" type of programme. The themes evoked by the "informative" would in fact
introduce a much broader and institutional context (the promotion of better understanding between the political communities of the two countries) which remains at the margins of this study.

(379) Radio Times, February 5, 1932.

(380) "Policy and procedure as to foreign and overseas relays," June 22, 1932, BBC WAC, "Relays. Exchanges with the USA 1932-1938."

(381) In the 1930s, radio stars appeared in many films released in Britain. See, for instance, "The Big Broadcast" whose Radio Times review (February 17, 1933) is quoted in the opening paragraphs of chapter 6.

(382) Radio Times, September 7, 1934.

(383) Radio Times, July 14, 1933.

(384) Ibid.

(385) Radio Times, November 3, 1933.

(386) Radio Times, November 3, 1933. Pola was not very popular with the B.B.C. In 1940 confronted with the repeated rejections of the Corporation he would bitterly write: "Without being unduly egotistic ... surely I have contributed sufficient in the way of interesting and original shows to warrant a little more attention? I am always put off with varied and strange excuses." (Letter to Arthur Brown, May 2, 1940, BBC WAC, "Artists P/F: Eddie Pola" File 1.) He found a much better reception in the continental stations transmitting in English to the British Isles, for which he worked stably. In fact, interviewed by an independent magazine in 1938 he would complain about the "restrictions imposed on English programmes from foreign stations," and criticize the overall style of the B.B.C. output: "'What is wanted is warmth. Something about a fellow that makes you either like him or detest him,'" he exclaimed. And when the interviewer guessed: "'I suppose that this warmth and easy style doesn't come as easily to the Englishman as to the American,' I said. 'That's just it,' said Eddie. 'I have a theory that the Englishman's voice isn't suited to broadcasting.'" (Radio Pictorial, May 13, 1938.) American influence on the
continental stations of the 1930s was in fact strong. For the story of their American, or Americanized, producers see for instance *Radio Pictorial*, March 22, 1935; November 19, 1937; and June 23, 1939, where it was maintained that Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy "have not only some of the best American features, but all the cream skimmed from the British programmes." See also *Broadcasting*, February 15, 1935; November 1, 1936; June 1, 1937.

(387) Even Americans liked it. The Buffalo Broadcasting Corporation (of the C.B.S. network) wrote to the B.B.C. saying that "the consensus of opinion was that the entertainment was excellent and extremely entertaining and the impersonating superb." (Letter from Herbert Rice to Miss Quigley, of the Foreign Department of the B.B.C., September 13, 1934, BBC WAC, E1/133.) Some (or all) "America Calling" programmes were relayed in the United States. (See also D. Cardiff, unpublished.) The Buffalo Broadcasting Corporation and C.B.S. declared that they might want to retaliate. See the *Radio Times*, August 18, 1933.

(388) In producing his fourth programme, in 1934, Pola had said he had been "faced with a pretty problem. I knew that there were only one or two American radio stars known to English audience that I had not done before. Therefore I had either to repeat some of those I had done, or else get a new thought." (Radio Times, September 7, 1934.) He then decided he would have a few English artists who were touring America at the time of the show.


(390) It was broadcast either as "Five Hours Back" or "Six Hours Back" (depending on the changing time difference) on February 16-April 27, May 4-25, October 5-December 21 1935 and February 1-March 28, 1936. The BBC WAC holds records of the various items broadcast within most programme of the series. See "Relays. Saturday Afternoon Relays from America" File 1b.

(391) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Presentation Assistant (Mr. Adams) to Controller (Programmes), July 23, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Saturday Afternoon
Relays from America" File 1b.


(393) *Radio Times*, February 8, 1935.

(394) A month after the opening of the programme Miss Quigley, the B.B.C. officer in charge of the organization of the relays, wrote: "the material ..., although nobody admits it, is obviously well above the standard of their ordinary forenoon programmes." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, March 20, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Saturday Afternoon. Relays from America" File 1a.)

(395) However, "He did not suggest that the provision of these special programs was in any way a financial embarassment. In fact, he rather gave me the reverse impression for he said they had become so popular with listeners over here that they are worthwhile even for their own sake without their being sent across the Atlantic." (Letter from Felix Greene to C. G. Graves, December 27, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Saturday Afternoon Relays from America" File 2.) When, in December 1936 the B.B.C. considered a revival of the series, confronted with a C.B.S. proposal suggesting that they really have a weekly half hour of a normal sustaining program, the North American Representative admitted: "I know myself the attraction of putting on a program such as Columbia suggests. But it may, I fear, become humdrum and rather dull - that is if we are to remain true to our decision to let them give us a normal program." (Letter from N.A.R. to Controller (programmes), December 2, 1936, BBC WAC, "Relays: Five Hours Back.")

(396) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo to N.A.R., July 15, 1937, BBC WAC, "Relays: Five Hours Back."

(397) Letter from Graves to Bate (N.B.C.), March 20, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Saturday Afternoon Relays from America" File 1a. *Radio Pictorial* praised enthusiastically the series; "the Americans," it wrote, "seem to make an ordinary dance tune sound almost classical." (April 26, 1935.)

(398) From Graves to Bate, December 10, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Saturday Afternoon Relays from America" File 2.

(400) The Listener published the texts of many of his comments. The Library of Congress holds the scripts (Raymond G. Swing Collection in the Manuscript Division) and the recordings (Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division) of most of his radio talks which are available for research. My comments are based on a selective use of that material. See also Raymond G. Swing, Good Evening! A Professional Memoir, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

(401) In December of the same year the B.B.C. explicitly wrote to the Oxford Union Society: "Frankly our own experience of broadcasting transatlantic inter-university debates has not been very encouraging; as an item in our programmes they never appeared to us very successful." (December 24, 1935, BBC WAC, "Relays. Transatlantic Debates" - where the correspondence with the Americans is also to be found.)

(402) So he was introduced to the radio audience at the National Press Club Luncheon broadcast on N.B.C. red on November 12, 1973 at 8.30 p.m. (LC-MpBRs).

(403) Letter from A. Cooke to L. Fielden, September 2, 1934. Fielden reassured him: "There is no rule about American slang - in fact no rule about anything," only customary behaviours, he could have added. But that seemed beyond the point. (Letter from Fielden to Cooke, September 19, 1934. Both letters in BBC WAC, "Talks. Cooke, Alistair, 1932-35".) Cooke would broadcast his ideas on the irresistible Americanization of the English language in one of his talks from America (the BBC WAC hold the script of the speech, transmitted as "The Impact
of America" at 8.40 p.m. on June 17, 1937.) That the B.B.C. policy on language was actually a little less flexible than Fielden admitted is demonstrated by the very existence of a B.B.C. Committee on the Spoken Word, polemically described by Peter Eckersley: "The Americans, who are vital people, have enormously enriched the English language by new words and phrases. These Americanisms, on their first introduction, were considered to be vulgar slang; now usage has made them respectable and even sometimes pompous. A B.B.C. Committee, comprising a Scotsman, a Welshman, an Irishman and two Englishmen, sat down to rule for ever how English words should be pronounced." (Eckersley, Power.) See below.

(404) On the history of these theories, see Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, London: Chatto & Windus, 1961, p. 248, 250: "It is now customary, in language theory, to mark three kinds of English speech: Received Standard ...; Regional Dialects; and Modified Standard, which has gained currency in varying kinds in different areas, representing a development from regional dialects but falling short of Received Standard ... While in certain respects 'Received Standard' was in the general line of evolution, in other respects it moved away from this, by the fact of its becoming identified with a particular class. Of course it became entrenched in education, and then in broadcasting, and so had wide effects on the national development, but at the same time the ordinary linguistic process was operating, through the other kinds of social change. Indeed in becoming identifiable as 'Public School English', which is in fact its more accurate description, certain barriers were raised against its general adoption, and these have to be set against the effects in education and broadcasting." For the 19th century antecedents in the building up of the standard language, see Brian Doyle, "The Invention of English," in Englishness. Politics and Culture, pp. 89-115.

(405) "To American ears, 'Received Standard' was always unacceptable ... Not only have hundreds of American words, speech forms and pronunciations being
taken, often unnoticed, into English, but American speech has had an influence on almost all kinds of traditional English speaking, and it is worth noticing that it works against every single sound that was identified as peculiarly 'Received Standard.'" (Williams, *Long Revolution*, p. 252.) See also Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 1: 242-244; and Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, pp. 160-161: "There was a strong didactic element in pronunciation, stress and even the mechanics of the language. The Committee and B.B.C. staff had high ideals." Insofar as audience's attitudes were concerned, "it appears that the B.B.C.'s efforts were treated largely with indifference. The general, rather ill-defined hostility to the accent of the announcers, particularly in the North of England, Scotland and Wales was not translated into an active and coordinated resistance movement."

(406) See for instance the *Listener*, July 8, 1936: "Americanisms have filtered back to England ... at the moment American is a virile and exciting language. It is perhaps too early for 40 millions Englishmen to get on to the bandwagon; but within the next ten years - if only for our own peace of mind - we may have to substitute at least a critical tolerance for our traditional and automatic prejudice." Three years later the secretary of the B.B.C. Advisory Committee on Spoken English would be even more respectful of American English. See *Listener*, May 18, 1939. Besides, the Sub-Committee on Words was chaired by Logan Pearsall Smith, an American graduated from Oxford. See Vivian Ducat, "Words from the Wise," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1986, pp. 70-76 - brought to my attention by David W. Ellwood.

(407) The awkward relations between the American and British film industries have been studied rather extensively. The book by Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street remains a valuable work of reference. See Margaret Dickinson, and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State. The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-1984*, London: British Film Institute, 1985.

(408) See *Radio Times*, March 20, April 10, 17, 1936.
Letter from Director of Talks to E. J. and M. L. Arnett, February 2, 1936, BBC WAC, "Talks. Cooke, Alistair, 1936-37." Cooke's talks were judged excellent under every respect. He, the letter said, "has the advantage of being entirely unconnected with the film industry, of having a good standard of taste, and of being averse to talking on the cinema in terms of what are sometimes called 'high-brow technicalities.'"

Speech broadcast at 10.20 p.m. on January 19, 1939 within the series "Mainly about Manhattan," BBC WAC, Cooke's scripts.

The Listener, April 10, 1935. The programme was broadcast weekly at 8.00 or 9.00 p.m.

This is what is stated in an April report: "Programme correspondence is as yet small. This is not surprising. It is however uniformly favourable to the series and not one criticism has reached us." ("American Half Hour - 13th April," April 24, 1935, BBC WAC, R19/31.)


Radio Times, March 22, 1935. The negative allusion to the relays is a symptom of the existing competition among programmes. It does not imply a consistent policy on the part of the B.B.C.

In Autumn 1933, Malcolm Frost, a B.B.C. official, toured Malta, Egypt, South Africa, India, Ceylon, Far East, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, Western Indies and South America precisely to promote B.B.C. programmes. See BBC WAC, E4/46, E4/48, E4/49, E4/50. Records for the "Empire Transcription Service" were in fact ready by then.


Greene remained in office till the outbreak of the war. In September 1939 he resigned because, being a radical pacifist, he, and the B.B.C., found his
continuance in office politically untenable. Before being appointed North
American Representative he had worked in the United States for two years as a
member of the B.B.C. Talks Department.

(420) In May 1937 Greene reported on the B.B.C. increasing importance in the
United States. He attributed it to various factors. In the first place, there
were the American listeners to the B.B.C. Empire Service (broadcast on short-
waves); secondly, the number of B.B.C. programmes relayed by the American
networks had increased; finally, Greene wrote, "there have been in the past six
months two great British events - the Abdication and the Coronation - upon
which the American people have lavished the full measure of their unrestrained
and enthusiastic interest. It is impossible to convey the intensity of the
country's absorption in both the Abdication and Coronation broadcasts. Even
though the King's Coronation speech came at the height of the afternoon - the
whole nation paused in its work to listen." ("N.A.R. Report," May 19, 1937, BBC
WAC, E1/212/2.) Besides, since the early 1930s, the B.B.C. had been contacted
by the American managers of educational broadcasting (see BBC WAC, E1/197) and
it remained the centre of attraction of some sectors of the movement of opinion
which favoured a reform of American broadcasting.

(423) Controller (Programmes) to N.A.R., January 11, 1937, BBC WAC, E1/113/3.
(424) Greene himself had to acknowledge his role as the custodian of the image
of the B.B.C. His reports regularly recorded this side of his activity, which
he summarized in May 1937: "I must admit that I never foresaw the extent to
which this office could become a source of information or a point of contact
with such a variety of institutions ... It is due to our activity in this field
(never sought by us but developing spontaneously on its own) that the B.B.C.
has become better understood in America. The silly, and sometimes malicious,
misinformation which I at first so frequently encountered has practically
ceased." ("N.A.R. Report," May 19, 1937, BBC WAC, E1/113/2.) The "supply-on-demand" information policy was a basic principle governing the official British presence in the United States. (See Taylor, Projection, p. 77.)

(425) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Acting Controller (Programmes) to N.A.R., March 16, 1937, BBC WAC, "Relays: Five Hours Back".


(427) See Felix Greene, "Autumn Broadcasts from America," Radio Times, October 8, 1937. Swing's talks enjoyed a significant success, as the decision to broadcast them on Saturday evening testifies. See BBC WAC, "Relays Swing, Raymond Gram" File 2. The programmes on the "real America" - in spite of their theoretical priority - had till then been the weak point of the work of the B.B.C. New York office, according to Greene. See B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, February 4, 1938, BBC WAC, "Relays: Coast to Coast 1938-39."


(429) Felix Greene, "Future Programmes from USA," May 18, 1938, BBC WAC, E1/207/1.

(430) See B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from N.A.R. to Controller (Programmes), February 4, 1938, BBC WAC, "Relays: Coast to Coast 1938-39."

(431) As R. G. Swing wrote on the Listener (September 15, 1938).

(432) Listener, September 15, 1938.


(434) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo to Director of Talks, June 29, 1937, BBC WAC, "Relays: America Speaks" File 1a. In fact, political considerations as interpreted by the B.B.C. conditioned the subjects dealt with much more than the speaker's background.

(435) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from N.A.R. to Director of Talks, February 25, 1938, BBC WAC, "Relays: America Speaks" File 1b. The series was
not very well received in Broadcasting House, first for the problems of style mentioned by Greene and secondly because it was politically too much in favour of the New Deal, according to the B.B.C. management. Nonetheless, it was continued.

(436) "Policy and procedure as to foreign and overseas relays," June 22, 1932, BBC WAC, "Relays. Exchanges with the U.S.A., 1932-1938." The "running commentary" method, in particular, had not yet been introduced into British radio. In 1929 the Radio Times had reported on its popularity in the United States. (See Radio Times, April 5, 1929: "An American friend tells me that running commentary are almost the most popular feature of radio 'over there.' Commentaries on the big football games are especially appreciated.") More than three years later a B.B.C. journalist, George Allison, endeavoured to visit the United States "to study the American method of running commentary." (Radio Times, November 25, 1932.)


(438) Letter from Greene to C. G. Graves, February 24, 1937, BBC WAC, E1/113/3. Indeed Greene thought this should have been his role: to prevent American commentators to destroy the educational, or informative, content of the American broadcasts. He managed to express his opinion on the subject on various occasions. In September 1936, for instance, he proposed "to announce the negro program on October 18th myself ... It's so necessary to get the feel of a negro crowd, children and all, in a probably ramshackle and dusty wooden church - and to leave it to an American announcer would be fatal." (Letter to Miss Benzie, September 22, 1936, BBC WAC, "Relays. Mutual Broadcasting System, 1935-1939.")

(439) "The B.B.C. became jazz-conscious in 1937," Perowne writes, "largely though the interest of Harman Griesewood - now Chief Assistant to the Director General - who, with me ... did a series of gramophone programmes called 'Kings of Jazz.'" (B.B.C. Internal Circulating memo, from Leslie Perowne, June 10, 1937.)


(441) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Perowne (the London producer of the programmes) to N.A.R., August 11, 1938, BBC WAC, "Relays: America Dances 1938" File 2a.

(442) Relayed on Saturdays from the N.B.C. studios in New York, "Musical See-Saw" consisted of a series of "entertainment programmes reviving past hit tunes, and good tunes that for some reason failed to attain the status of hits." (Radio Times, September 23, 1938.)

(443) From N.A.R. to Editor, Radio Times, October 10, 1938, BBC WAC, "Relays. Jam Sessions from America 1938-39." The players were: Dave Tough, Carmen Mastren, Bobby Hackett, Eddie Condon, Pewee Russell, Joe Bushkin, Joe Marsala (who had the idea of holding the B.B.C. Jam Session and persuaded most of his partner musicians to go to the party), Marty Marsala, Bud Freeman, Zutty Singleton, Jess Stacey, Tommy Dorsey, Lee Wiley, Art Shapiro, Mezz Mezzrow, and Sidney Bechet.

(444) The players included Joe Marsala, Jack Teagarden, Charlie Teagarden, Chuck Berry, Harry James, Teddy Wilson, George Wettling, John Kirby, Red Mackenzie. Leslie Perowne, who was then in the B.B.C. Gramophone Department, in May-June 1963 reconstructed the history of the two sessions. (See BBC WAC, "Progr. Relays. Jam Sessions from America 1938-39.")
Radio Times, May 16, 1963. Perowne says that only $374 were paid (apart from liberal champagne) for the first session and $275 for the second. Both sessions were recorded in New York (recordings held in the B.B.C. Sound Archive).

Felix Greene, "Future Programs from U.S.A.," May 18, 1938, BBC WAC, E1/207/1. Besides, Greene personally preferred the informative type of programme. In that same report he added that he was prepared to sacrifice "any number of dance bands and variety shows" to a good commentary series.


That there was a B.B.C. version of it seems undisputable. Leonard Miall (interview, August 12, 1987) and Alistair Cooke (November 12, 1973 N.B.C. radio programme) agree in saying that when the B.B.C. asked them to produce programmes on America they usually proposed subjects which put it in a bad light (such as, Cooke jokingly recalled, American vulgarity, or American pretentiousness, or American materialism). See also paragraph 6.

Listener, September 15, 1938. The article continued: "Not the least of the uses of programmes relayed from America has been to counteract the impressions which so many English people hold of American life as a result of frequent visits to the cinema. For the film-goer sees more of the United states than he does of any other foreign country and it is the responsibility of the American film industry that the impression he gets from it remains, even today, considerably distorted." British public service broadcasting vs. American private film industry to protect the image of the United States as if they wanted to teach the U.S. the benefits of public control: wonders of British superiority!

"Chief Engineer’s Visit to the United States," January 4, 1934, BBC WAC,


(456) The B.B.C. continued to express its amazement at this habit in U.S. radio all through its history. See for instance *Radio Times*, August 13, 1937, where certain C.B.S. and N.B.C. Shakespeare productions are praised "but broadcasting Shakespeare is a speedier matter there than here. One radio paper refers to it as 'streamlined Shakespeare' - meaning that they do The Taming of the Shrew in three quarters of an hour.") Gielgud himself, Briggs writes, "greatly prized" the freedom "of being able to select plays both short and long, a freedom which he said American commercial broadcasting never permitted. He was opposed to the 'tyranny of the stop watch'," Briggs adds, "and in the conditions of the 1930s found it less difficult to defend this policy than it was to be later. During the early months of the Second World War, for instance, all plays had to be cut short to fit into the single programme." (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 1: 162.)

(457) "Notes on Summary of Special Programmes in the Year 1926," February 18, 1927, BBC WAC, R34/323.

(458) See for instance the comments by R. Eckersley, *BBC and All*, p. 173.

(459) "Dramatic Control Panel" [1934], BBC WAC, R19/276. Eric Maschwitz, editor of the *Radio Times* in the early 1920s, Head of B.B.C. Variety in the 1930s, composer and script-writer (author of the screen version of 'Good-bye Mr. Chips') writes that when he arrived at the B.B.C. in 1926 he was fascinated by
these new techniques of radio drama: "with the improvement of technical gear it had become possible to link several studios to a central control-panel from which the producer could give the cue to his actors by means of signal-lights; the sound from each studio could be faded up and down or mixed; sound effects could be added from specially equipped studios." (Maschwitz, No Chip, p. 54; "the pioneers of this new technique, "he goes on, "were Lance Sieveking ... Tyrone Guthrie ... and Cecil Lewis.")

(460) As late as 1947 the dramatic-control-panel and multiple-studio technique had powerful supporters, such as the B.B.C. Productions Director, Val Gielgud: "The B.B.C. was not only the pioneer in this field," he wrote, "it was left firmly alone in it ... Nonetheless, I remain an impenitent advocate of the more complex system ... In the U.S. it seems to be taken for granted that the radio play producer should act almost in the same capacity of an orchestral conductor ... This certainly leads to greater direct personal control, but I find it hard to believe that it is possible simultaneously to give so much personal attention visually to what is going on in the studio, and simultaneously to keep a proper aural grip upon the play as it comes out of the loudspeaker in the listening room." (Gielgud, Years of the Locust, pp. 86-89.)

(461) Radio Times, April 18, 1930. In 1934 Noel Ashbridge, B.B.C. Chief Engineer, would draw a very similar picture of U.S. radio drama; "plays are still performed on the simple one-studio basis," he insisted, "No dramatic control arrangements are used. Plays, such as they were, seemed to be well performed, but they were, in my opinion, too short to be much good." (Chief Engineer's Visit to the U.S., January 4, 1934, BBC WAC, El/120/1.)

(462) Czitrom, Media and American Mind, p. 85.

(463) See Ibid., pp. 51-52; Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 2: 104.


However, when in his biography he attempted a comparison between British and American achievements in radio drama, Gielgud was positive: "I am not anxious to involve myself in the thorny byways of controversy over the respective merits of commercially-sponsored and monopoly broadcasting. But there is little doubt that as far as the broadcasting of plays is concerned, the terms of the B.B.C.'s charter have been inestimably beneficial." In the States, he argued in 1947, "the broadcast play (the activities of the Columbia Workshop always excepted) has hardly emerged from its swaddling bands. Rehearsals concentrated on split-second timing, almost complete subservience to the advertising value of star names, the low payment of actors in 'sustaining' programmes as compared with the swollen fees paid by advertising sponsors, have all combined to maintain the broadcasting of plays in the U.S. on a level comparatively elementary. To this generalization ... the output of the Columbia Workshop has been an outstanding and most honourable exception. But here, perhaps, the emphasis has been thrown too forcibly the other way. The value of experiment has been over-emphasized at the expense of value of content." (Gielgud, Years of the Locust, pp. 81-82.) For a brief summary of the history of the early developments of B.B.C. radio drama (its popularity and artistic achievements) see D. L. LeMahieu, A Culture for Democracy. Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 190-197, where reference is also made to the different treatment received by dramatists by the broadcasting organizations in Britain and America. LeMahieu seems however to oversimplify the American scenario. For an excellent overview on the B.B.C. radio drama productions in the 1930s and Gielgud's role in its determination, see Briggs, History of Broadcasting, pp. 160-169. B.B.C. drama production will be analysed further in chapter 6 below as an indicator of the
"Britishness" of the Corporation output.

(468) Radio Times, October 8, 1937.

(469) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 163.

(470) Radio Times, August 8, 1938.

(471) "There were great difficulties at first in defining what a 'feature' was... Laurence Gilliam drew a distinction between Features and Drama... Features dealt with fact, Drama dealt with fiction. Where fact ended and fiction began was never clear... even in - or perhaps particularly in - the newspapers of the day." (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 168. Features was organizatively separated from Drama in 1936). In his introduction to a collection of essays on British radio drama, John Drakakis has explains rather effectively where drama and feature continued to overlap even after the bureaucratic separation; see John Drakakis, ed., British Radio Drama, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 7-8. See also Laurence Gilliam, ed., B.B.C. Features, London: BBC, 1950, pp. 9-14.

(472) According to what Bridson himself writes in his autobiography, the programme was indeed so famous that in 1937 N.B.C. asked him "for a special production" of it. (Bridson, Prospero and Ariel, p. 91. A description of the programme is at the pp. 57-58.)

(473) Radio Times, August 5, 1938.

(474) Bridson, Prospero and Ariel, p. 94.

(475) "There is also evidence that in the late 1930s the B.B.C. was increasingly adopting programme ideas from the U.S.A. and the continental commercial stations, especially audience participation shows, amateur discovery shows, quizzes, panel games and the like, which were exceptionally cheap to produce." (Cardiff, "Time, Money and Culture," Media, Culture and Society, 5 (1983): 388.) See also David Cardiff, "The Serious and the Popular: Aspects of the Evolution of Style in the Radio Talk," Media Culture and Society 2 (1980), p. 37.
Vic Oliver, *Mr. Show Business*, London: Harrap, 1954, p. 86, 88. His parody must have been staged more or less at the same time that Eddie Pola's first programme went on the air. It is impossible to ascertain whether it was sheer coincidence. As for the reasons which might have prompted famous American artists to work in England, no reliable documentation exists to formulate a reasonable hypothesis which would apply to all. Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon often declared they liked living in England. Oliver, who was perhaps in an exceptional situation (he later married Winston Churchill's daughter, Sarah, and might have backdated his good memories of England) writes that when in 1933-34 he was forced to go back to the United States after his first British performances, he was "longing to return to England, where working conditions were infinitely better." (Ibid., p. 89.)

The term "Americanization" is used here to indicate ideas, styles and formats more or less explicitly imparted from the United States and afterwards reproduced in Britain. David Cardiff has excellently described its meaning discussing in detail the single programmes and series (unpublished). His example will be followed here. And his conclusions ("The output of the late 1930s was pervaded by a spirit of populism ... It was a populism that was essentially American in the superficiality of its democratic intentions") hopefully verified and discussed.


See MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!*., p. 47. "By 1936," MacDonald adds, "Bowes was receiving ten thousand applications a week." The Library of Congress - Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division holds a recordings of a Major Bowes' show (broadcast on September 3, 1935) where Frank Sinatra made his first radio appearance with The Hoboken Four. See MacDonald, p. 48 - the date given by MacDonald (1937), however, does not coincide with the Library
of Congress documentation. The enormous popularity enjoyed by Major Bowes' programmes was part of a "burst of contests and games." (See Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 2: 102.)

(482) Radio Times, April 17, 1936.
(483) Radio Times, April 21, 1936.
(484) See MacDonald, Don't Touch That Dial!, p. 48.
(485) Under this title and description the programme appeared on the weekly schedule. David Cardiff maintains, I believe correctly, that "when the B.B.C. did begin to import ideas from America it often imbued them with its characteristic aura of solemnity." (Unpublished.)
(486) Script of the programme broadcast on the Regional Programme at 4.55 p.m., BBC WAC, R19/1194/2.
(487) Radio Pictorial, March 4, 1938.
(488) David Cardiff has written that in England "Spelling Bees ... were conducted in the sepulcral tones of an oral examination (the results were printed by the Times in the style of chess reports)." (Unpublished.)
(489) Radio Pictorial, May 27, 1938.
(490) B.B.C. Internal Correspondence, n.d., n.s., BBC WAC, R19/1194/2.
(491) I could not find listener research data on the spelling bees. The letters from the audience published on the Radio Times and the B.B.C. internal correspondence would however seem to indicate a wide appreciation.
(492) Henry Hall's "Guest Night" (broadcast in 1934) for instance. (As David Cardiff suggests, Unpublished.)
(493) See Radio Pictorial, May 27, 1938. Bridson describes the programme as the first one in which the B.B.C. admitted "'actuality speakers'" (it was the term used by the B.B.C. to define the "man in the street" as the American definition would rather sound.) (Bridson, Prospero and Ariel, p. 51.)
(494) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 140. Radio Pictorial complained about the scarce use of regular variety features (February 8, 1935).
Given the numerous and diverse definitions which could be given of the
object to be quantified the enterprise looks adventurous and unpromising.
Besides, even if a satisfactory definition could be devised, since the late
1930s, the sheer size of the exchange complicates immensely the task. Then
while clinging to the idea that only a fragmented but in-depth analysis might
try to establish with a reasonably high degree of thoroughness the phenomenon
dimensions, the summary here given will simply attempt to draw the main lines
of a terribly confused picture. A less tentative general picture will be given
only in the conclusive chapter of part II (chapter 6).

A glance at a sample of B.B.C. programmes (January 29 to February 4,
1928; January 30 to February 5, 1938) seems to confirm that, even taking into
account that in 1938 the Sunday broadcasting day was much longer, American
material had been increasing.

For a general overview of the development of the gramophone industry and
its "Americanizing" effects, see LeMahieu, Culture for Democracy, pp. 82-99.

Percy Scholes, "Remarks upon the Present Practice and Relative Success of
Broadcasting in Britain and the United States, as a Result of Observation in
Both Countries," February 2, 1926, BBC WAC, R4/2/5.

Nevertheless, American "infiltration" as it would later be called (see
chapter 5) in musical programmes was overwhelming. Arrangements, for instance, were generally made on American inspiration. See "Dance Bands" - Memorandum, February 5, 1937, BBC WAC, R19/244.

(504) See for instance Radio Times, July 20, September 7, 23, October 12, 26, 1928.

(505) It should not be forgotten that till very late the B.B.C. audience was socially limited (see chapter 3). Still, what could be heard from listeners seemed to suggest that various forms of contempt towards American culture were indeed widespread (the Radio Times correspondence might be instructive from this point of view).


(509) Ibid., p. 95. The Radio Times gave much space to the discussion on jazz and American music; positions ranged from those who utterly despised jazz - such as Sir Henry Coward who wrote: "jazz, unashamed, as we know it, came into notice by certain 'newly rich' Americans disregarding the established conventions, and giving their patronage to the unconventional vulgarity of the plantation version of nigger improvisations or popular melodies ... It was
imported into England by rich vulgarity regardless of expense,” (Radio Times, September 7, 1928) - through those who thought that an English jazz should be developed - Christopher Lambert, for instance, who declared: “In spite of the supposed stolidity of the English I should not be surprised if they were to develop jazz music on serious lines farther than any other nationality. This need not mean that English music would become Americanized,” (Radio Times, July 20, 1928) - to the many who loved American jazz.

(510) His memorandum on "American Control of the Entertainment Industry" (November 7, 1929, BBC WAC, R34/918/1) is extensively quoted in Cardiff, "Time, Money and Culture." In the introductory letter which accompanied his memorandum Cock mentioned articles appeared on the Morning Post and a certain "Major Arkinson's Investigations," both dealing with the problem he was attempting to tackle.

(511) That the B.B.C. gradually attempted to popularize its programmes is beyond doubt. The recent works by Cardiff and Scannell have positively shown it. See David Cardiff, "Mass Middlebrow Laughter: the Origins of B.B.C. Comedy," Media, Culture and Society 10 (1988), pp. 41-60; of the same author, "Time, Money and Culture;" Cardiff, and Scannell, "Serving the Nation;" and "Broadcasting and National Unity;"; P. Scannell, "Music for the Multitude?". The role of the American threat (either directly from the United States or through the commercial continental stations) should not be overrated, though. "Goodwill on the part of the public" had been and will always be a crucial aim to assure the B.B.C.'s very existence.

(512) Radio Times, July 4, 1930.

(513) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, September 11, 1930, BBC WAC, R34/918/1.

(514) See the Radio Times, March 20, 1931: "Broadcasting is co-operating forcefully in promoting the interests of our native song-writers. Jack Payne also is devoting an ever-increasing section of his programmes to British dance numbers. Only in this way can we combat the invasion of powerfully advertised
light music from America." The figures followed.

(515) Radio Times, October 30, 1931. A few months later, Lawrence Gilliam declared himself convinced of the decline of jazz (which he did not appreciate as the author of the quoted editorial) and of American influence. (Radio Times, January 1, 1931.)

(516) "Jazz is the light music of the day," it said, "it grew up in the New World and has been imposed upon the Old. If the songs which American radio feeds to its listeners are often trite in sentiment and monotonous in rhythm ... they are at least the popular songs of America itself, the new American folk - and the negroid elaborations of them into 'hot music' awake an answering chord in the listener." (Radio Times, February 17, 1933.)

(517) Listener, April 13, 1932.

(518) "Letters pour into the B.B.C. and the daily press condemning this dreadful American crooning (poor America is blamed for so many things wherein England unquestionably shares the guilt). Yet the fact remains that thousands of people take it quite seriously, like it and enjoy it ... Americans got very near to the secret of crooning. They have sometimes called it Intimate Personality Singing ... Who are the haters of crooning? They can be classified by examining the letters to the press. There are the scholars and the intellectuals ... There are tough, solid, sensible people ... who are embarrassed by all sentimentality." (Radio Times, May 21, 1937.) It must have been also a matter of changing times and evolving public tastes. Only a few years before, in 1934, in a polemic article against the crooning mania, the popular Radio Pictorial had maintained: "Let all the broadcasting dance bands employ singers (not crooners) for three months and let all the refrains be sung in a virile, English fashion ... What is really wanted is an English school of light songsters ... This crooning is not English. It has been borrowed from America." (Radio Pictorial, July 13, 1934.)

(519) As the more moderate Roger Eckersley reported. (B.B.C. Internal
Circulating Memo, from R. Eckersley to Controller (Programmes), February 7, 1936, BBC WAC, R34/918/1. Coatman, known as a most strenuous defender of an uncompromising insular attitude, was "former Professor of Imperial Economic Relations at the London School of Economics" and had been "deliberately brought in [the General Talks Department] as 'right wing offset' to 'balance' the direction of talks and news." (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 147.) Also Living (Director of the North Region) and others declared themselves opposed "to any general influx of American methods;" "but in a milder degree," Eckersley added.

(520) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Eckersley to Controller (Programmes), February 7, 1936, BBC WAC R34/918/1.

(521) Many a professional broadcaster would agree on this evaluation. No later than September 24, 1986 Jeremy Isaacs, then Director of the British Television Channel Four, maintained that the a good "European" programme could only be the result of a truly national production financed by a international pool of European televisions. (Jeremy Isaacs, "La televisione europea, strumento di cultura europea," unpublished conference held at the European University Institute, September 24, 1986.)

(522) From Eckersley to Controller (Programmes), February 7, 1936, BBC WAC, R34/918/1.

(523) "Eric Maschwitz, my immediate boss [at the Radio Times] was always good-natured and always amusing. We had a lot in common, including the rabid pro-Americanism of the Twenties." (Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 30.)

(524) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Maschwitz to Controller of Programmes, February 5, 1936, BBC WAC, R34/918/1. The three programmes cited as "American in character" were "Romance in Rhythm", "Soft Lights and Sweet Music" and "The Vagabond Lover."

(525) Radio Pictorial, January 28, 1938. According to Radio Pictorial, most foreign artists had worked with the Music Department.
"Music Hall" was also one of the first programmes which the B.B.C. recorded for its Empire Transcriptions Service (BBC WAC E5/48).

(527) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Sharman to Assistant Director of Variety, July 9, 1936, BBC WAC, R34/918/1.

(528) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Controller (Programmes) to Assistant Director (Variety), July 3, 1936, BBC WAC, R34/918/1. According to Cardiff, that effort proved successful in the end. See Cardiff, "Mass Middlebrow Laughter."

(529) See also chapter 1.

(530) Times, August 14, 1934.

(531) "Report by Mr. R. A. Rendall," December 29, 1950, BBC WAC, R34/323.

(532) Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 45.

(533) "The pre-war system, with stations at known places broadcasting on known wavelengths, would have made it easy for raiding aircraft to take their direction from the broadcasts they picked up. The wartime scheme substituted one programme broadcast on medium wavelengths, with each wavelength shared by a group of stations, the locations of which were kept as secret as possible. When hostile aircraft were reported to be approaching one station of a group would close down, but listeners would still receive the programme on the same wavelength but from a more distant station." (Gorham, Broadcasting, pp. 164-165.)

(534) Ibid., p. 199.

(535) Ibid., p. 166.

(536) Ibid., p. 170. The Radio Times thus provided a service till then offered by World Radio, the B.B.C. international publication.

(537) As Briggs stressed: "The pre-1939 B.B.C. could be studied mainly on its own, with references, when necessary, to external relations with the Post Office and the Treasury. By contrast, no account of what happened between 1939
and 1945 would be complete without persistent reference first to the Ministry of Information ...; second to a cluster of ministries and departments ... which were responsible for the supervision or control of broadcasting to enemy countries; third to those home ministries, like Food and Health, which were interested in good public relations; fourth to the Armed Forces." (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 3: 31.)

(538) I am thinking of the four general changes which Briggs describes as: "the increased significance attached to news output" (which will be dealt with below); "the increasing use of recordings" (clearly not a product of American influence since recorded programmes were still taboo in the United States at the beginning of the war); "the increasing use of single-studio presentation" (see chapter 4); and "the introduction of the so-called 'continuity' system of presentation in the Overseas and Empire Service" (which will be dealt with below). (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 3: 47, 52-53.)

(539) They could not be compared, for instance, to the audience following the talk and news programmes from Germany. A survey conducted in November 1939 "by the British Institute of Public Opinion, completed before Silvey and his colleagues got to work, had shown that 50 per cent of those who listened to foreign stations listened to German medium-wave broadcasts in English from Hamburg and Bremen as compared with some 7 per cent before the war and as compared with 2 per cent who listened to New York and 10 per cent who listened to Paris. Moreover, listening to Hamburg and Bremen became progressively more popular with each step down the income scale, whereas listening to Paris and New York on short-wave was ordinarily more popular with the higher than with the lower income groups." The proportion of listeners to German programmes would then increase further during the war. (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 3: 148-149.) See also Gorham, *Broadcasting*, p. 174; and Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, pp. 137-143. The most famous announcer from Germany was 'Lord Haw-Haw.' His real name was William Joyce, a Britisher hired as a news reader in Berlin.
by the head of the German overseas short-wave service. The nick-name of 'Lord Haw-Haw' was given him by the British press.

(540) See chapter 4.

(541) See "N.A.R. Airmail Report N.1," April 29, 1941, BBC WAC, E1/212/2. The proposal to establish "a commonly owned and readily available shortwave channel from U.S. to Britain" had become "'politically' practicable" because the six companies until then fighting fiercely against each other in the field of international broadcasting had decided to come to an agreement and had appointed an "International Broadcasting Coordinator," almost a government supervisor who would control shortwave programmes.

(542) The two departments most directly involved in the formulation of an Anglo-American broadcasting policy were the North American department of the Foreign Office, and the American and Empire divisions of the Ministry of Information.

(543) Wellington’s report and personal papers are not open to research. However it may be interesting to quote what Cock wrote and did in relation to that mission: "Since Land-Lease and before I had heard of Wellington’s projected visit, I had been weighing the possibility of two separate developments in the broadcasting set-up here. The difficulties are great, but show signs of becoming less formidable as time goes on. I have not proceeded with either since Wellington’s projected visit became known, as I did not wish to come across anything he might be planning. The first ... concerns the provision of a reliable beamed transmission eastwards from the States. It is possible that such a station will actually be functioning soon if the latest improvements in the N.B.C. shortwave transmitters come up to expectations ... The second idea might have seemed fantastic a short time ago. It is that the Administration might be persuaded to consider carrying their policy of 'all aid to Britain short of war' to the fourth arm by officially sponsoring a 15 or 30 minute period once a week ... on each of the three major networks ... for an
authoritative broadcast of news, policy, progress and plans affecting the two countries ... to be regularly recorded and rebroadcast domestically in Britain the next day." ("N.A.R. Airmail Report N.2," June 12, 1941, BBC WAC, E1/212/2.)

(The B.B.C. reacted very unfavourably to the latter proposal.)

(544) The political history of Anglo-American broadcasting before the rest of the world is not dealt with here. As such, that history has never been told. Important fragments are to be found in Briggs' volumes, though, and a questionable but general interpretation in Tunstall, The Media Are American. However, tensions between the two countries seem to have been almost as strong as the will to co-operate at least since the very day when the British discovered that Americans might wish to propagate their own ideas and discourses and that the problem would not only be to awake Americans to the wonders of international propaganda. Once instructed, it was soon found out, the pupil might well grow totally independent of his master. It did not take much for the British to find it out. "The fact is," Wellington wrote to the B.B.C. Deputy Director General, "that there is no one person or agency in Washington charged with the solution of the broadcasting problem. There are signs of awareness that problems of control or coordination, organisation into an effective instrument exist, but it is dubious whether such problems will be tackled, or the solution to them made public, until and unless U.S. comes into the war in a formal sense ... The signs and portents, moreover, suggest that official America sees herself as the senior partner in any combine and proposes to pursue American policy in her use of the instruments of propaganda." (June 30, 1941, BBC WAC, E1/299.)


(546) This direct consequence of the North American Service was first noted by Asa Briggs; see below. In an article entirely devoted to the political history of the N.A.S. Peter Spence also acknowledges its cultural impact; see Peter Spence, "The B.B.C. North American Service 1939-1945," Media, Culture and
Society 4 (October 1982): 361-376; esp. p. 376. The N.A.S. first Director, Maurice Gorham, described very clearly how crucial his department was to the development of Anglo-American relations in broadcasting. "When I found my way around the new job and began to settle down," he wrote, "I realized that there was more than one facet to the work of directing our broadcasts to North America. First there was the North American Service itself, which at that time ran about 7 and a half hours a day ... Then there were special projects for rebroadcasting and exchange broadcasts ... This involved a lot of dealing with the American networks' representatives in London ... There American visitors to be looked after and their broadcasts arranged. There were dealings with the American departments of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information, with the American Embassy, and later with the U.S. Forces radio liaison men, of whom they had many. And before long I became a sort of general link with the New York Office and did a lot of things for them that it was nobody else's job to do. This was taking rather a wide view of my job," Gorham admitted, "and in some respects going beyond my original brief. But it always seemed to me that the person who was interested in North America primarily and all the time ought to have a say in everything that the B.B.C. broadcasts there and in all its dealings with American radio ... and in time this view came to be pretty generally shared." (Gorham, Sound and Fury, pp. 110-111.)

(547) In 1946 it was retrospectively estimated that throughout the war 120,000 listeners tuned in to the B.B.C. North American Service from the United States (and many must have been British citizens living in America). (See letter to B.B.C. North American Office, February 5, 1946, BBC WAC, E2/438/4.) Even if many of those 120,000 were opinion-makers, politicians and intellectuals, the N.A.S. positively revealed itself as a limited instrument of propaganda. Much more limited, for instance, than the B.B.C. programmes rebroadcast by the U.S. networks (in February 1946 the B.B.C. New York Office estimated that in the month of April of the preceding year 20% of all U.S. adults with radio sets -
more or less 15,500,000 people - had heard one or more rebroadcast B.B.C. programmes during the week; see B.B.C. New York Office, February 13, 1946, BBC WAC, E2/438/2.)

(548) "This audience in U.S.A. and Canada has to be compelled to listen," the B.B.C. Head of the Music Department wrote in 1941. ("Ten Notes on Short-Wave Transmissions to the U.S.A. and Canada 1939 to 1941," from A. Bliss to Stephen Tallents, July 14, 1941, BBC WAC, E2/438/2.)

(549) Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 105. Here Gorham is thinking of those who had not been working for the B.B.C. before the war and then left the corporation in 1945. But new ideas and attitudes were strong also among those who were and had been B.B.C. officials; Gorham himself, for instance; or Cecil Madden, who headed a special overseas variety unit, which Gorham describes as "the craziest corner of the whole Overseas set-up." (p. 107.)

(550) Ministry of Information. American Division, "Note on Broadcasting," December 13, 1939, BBC WAC, E2/19/1. Indeed during the war there were civil servants who would have accepted almost any degree of Americanization to the single aim of producing effective propaganda material. Not surprisingly, the most daring proposals came from people who were living, or had lived, in the United States. An officer of the British Consulate in Baltimore, for instance, urged the Foreign Office "to take a leaf from the book of successful American advertisers who have made the most careful study of the needs and desires of the masses and to present a series of radio programmes peculiarly fitted to these tastes. The ingredients, as tested, proved and supported by the vast expenditures of American advertisers, year after year, are as follows: Entertainment, Continuity, Action, Simplicity, Home Philosophy, Realism and Topicality." ("Foreword on Propaganda and Our Proposal," by J. W. Taylor, British Consulate, Baltimore, November 11, 1940, FO 371/26186 1941). However, this evokes problems and developments which lay beyond the scope of this work and would imply a much deeper analysis of British war propaganda than I can...
pursue here. For a wide overview see Short, ed., Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II, Parts One and Two.

(551) "Comments on Ministry of Information, American Division, Note on Broadcasting, of December 13th, 1939," January 22, 1940, BBC WAC, E2/19/2.
(552) "Broadcasting to North America," from R. A. Rendall, Director of Empire Service, January 9, 1941, BBC WAC, E2/438/1.
(553) Gorham, Sound and Fury, 114.
(554) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 47.
(555) Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 119.
(556) Radio Pictorial, June 23, 1939.
(558) "Extract from Report by N.A.R.," June 8, 1938, BBC WAC, E1/113/3. While a much greater care had been taken to organize the 1936 and 1937 Coronation broadcasts (see N.A.R. Reports, BBC WAC, E1/113/1-3) a similar lack of sensitiveness was displayed at the time of the abdication crisis. On the occasion of the announcement to Parliament of the King's decision to abdicate, Greene reported, the B.B.C. had managed to expose itself to ridicule by delaying the announcement so long. To explain the gross mistake which had been made, Greene quoted from the Chief News Editor's comments on the episode.
"'What made" the delay "worse in this instance was that everyone, in shops, in department stores, in factories, in schools, at loud-speakers in the streets was listening to the B.B.C. for what he expected to be the first announcement of the decision. All stations were on the B.B.C. This was at 3:30 p.m. G.M.T. What they in fact heard was nothing, and nothing for several minutes, not even
an announcement! Then, as if someone had just thought of it, the interval signal began - and at that time ... the cheerfully pealing bells could not possibly have sounded more out of place ... Then, at long last an announcement that nothing could yet be announced, so we would hear the Bournemouth band. Still the country held its breath and listened... Still it expected ... that it would be an English announcement from London that would tell the tale. But not a bit of it. The B.B.C. was interrupted - by all the networks and all the stations everywhere - by American announcers reading the words of the King as read in Parliament. Fully ten minutes later, when tension was relaxed, when sets everywhere had been turned off ... the B.B.C. gave out the news - as if it were quite new! It was pathetic and a little embarrassing." ("N.A.R. Report," January 4, 1937, BBC WAC, E1/113/3.) A similar situation (of Americans "jumping" ahead of the British with their own Queen’s message) had been reported in December 1936 when the following explanation was given: "the news service in America is so extremely well organized that, for example, on the afternoon of the announcement of the abdication, C.B.S.' news service from Transradio was quicker than Saerchinger's [C.B.S. man in London] broadcast service of information from the English tapes." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Foreign Director to Controller (Programmes), December 19, 1936, BBC WAC, E1/200).

(559) Letter from Miss Benzie to F. Greene, January 19, 1937, BBC WAC, E1/208/3. Greene had presented Broadcasting House with an American example of good, professional journalism: the talk given by Kung, acting head of the Nanking Government, from Nanking about the crisis caused by the kidnapping of Chang Kai-Shek; "I feel very tempted," he commented, "to launch into a lecture which is often on the tip of my tongue about B.B.C. slowness in trying out more points for foreign programmes. We are not as alert and enquiring and experimental about it as I feel we should be. Did it ever occur to anyone in Broadcasting House to have a topical talk on China?" (B.B.C. Internal
To some extent Murrow was considered an exceptional type of broadcaster in U.S. radio. His personalities and achievements had attained popularity in Britain since the 1930s. In 1935 Felix Greene wrote about him: "He has never before faced the hurly burly of a commercial organization. I sometimes wonder how long his academic mind will stand it. He is one of the few people who have a vision of the place broadcasting should fill in the community or its potentialities in the education of the people." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo to Controller (Programmes), December 27, 1935, BBC WAC, E1/113/1.) As a matter of fact, his most famous programme, "The March of Time," directly influenced Lionel Fielden's "Newsreel" before the war. See the comments by Hilda Matheson, then Director of Talks, in "The Record of the B.B.C.," Political Quarterly 6 (October 1935), pp. 510-511. In that same year Charles Brewer, the B.B.C. Assistant Director of Variety, was in the U.S. on a duty visit and could follow through "one of those daily March of Time programmes which for over ten years brought Mr. and Mrs. America their nightly news in highly dramatized form and is still entertaining the world on celluloid [he is writing in 1948]. To start to follow a March of Time through to the finish was like taking a leap off the highest diving board. You took the deepest possible breath, because you knew you would not have a chance to take another until the show was over." (Brewer, Spice of Variety, p. 149; see also Brewer's colourful description on the Radio Times, November 29, 1935.) The Radio Times also followed closely the world famous Murrow programme and acknowledged its importance as a creative
innovation. "Few developments in broadcasting have aroused more interest among listeners than the recent experiments in the direction of enlivening the Second News on Saturday nights. The idea of amplifying the bare bones of the news announcements with short, descriptive reports by experts and eye-witnesses has seemed to some a welcome innovation, to others an interference with the established order in which they are accustomed to receive their news. It is interesting to compare with this experiment a feature of broadcasting which has proved its success in America, a country where unexampled ingenuity has gone to the presentation of news in the Press. For the last two years the C.B.S. has, on Friday nights, devoted half an hour to a programme called 'The March of Time', which has now gained enormous popularity. It consists of a vivid dramatisation of the news event of the week, going far beyond anything that has ever been attempted, or is likely to be attempted, over here. A particular feature of these programmes is the impersonation, by actors in the studio, of prominent people who are regularly in the news." (Radio Times, November 17, 1933.) John Grierson, the leading figure of the 1930s British "documentary movement" urged the B.B.C. to follow this model. "The example of The March of Time in America," he wrote, "suggests a dozen ways in which the public scene can be re-enacted and brought to life more vividly than we do it here. Like most people I have never felt the quality of the BBC so much as when at sea or abroad. Its quiet and measured and forthright performance gives the nation a voice of authority of which one may well be proud. I only ask that the voice be a little richer, a little more dramatic and a little more stirring to our loyalties." (Radio Times, November 20, 1936.) For a history of "The March of Time" (and a bibliography on the programme and Ed Murrow) see Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 1: 277-278.

(564) "Broadcasting to North America," n.d., BBC WAC, E2/438/1. Ernest Bushnell, a "tough, chunky, disrespectful Canadian" was brought over to London "to concentrate on the programmes broadcast between about 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. by
our time which was the best listening time in North America." In the opinion of Maurice Gorham, Bushnell was "just the right man to put some new ideas into the B.B.C. He set Overseas in the tradition of accurate timing and smooth presentation, till then unknown in British broadcasting." (Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 103.)


(566) "Ten Notes on Short-Wave Transmissions to the U.S.A. and Canada - 1939 to 1941" by A. Bliss (Director of Music Department), July 14, 1941, BBC WAC, E2/438/2.

(567) See Radio Times, March 24, 1933.

(568) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 53. In a report on "The development and principles of continuity", John Snagge, whom Briggs classifies as "one of the B.B.C.'s most experienced broadcasters" (p. 325) recalled that the idea was first aired in 1937, when it was realized that "the situation could have been dealt with far more efficiently and with greater certainty had there been immediate control of the broadcast by a programme representative." (John Snagge, "The Development and Principles of Continuity," September 28, 1945, BBC WAC R34/585/1.)

(569) B.B.C. Internal Memo, from Major Longland to Controller (Programmes), March 13, 1941, BBC WAC, R34/590/1.

(570) Barnouw writes for instance that "in 1938 negotiations were under way to test Hummert serials [Mr. and Mrs Hummert had formed within an advertising agency a separate agency to write serials] over Radio Luxembourg under American sponsorship, aimed at the British market." (Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 2: 97.)

(571) For a history of the development of soap operas in the United States, see Barnouw, History of Broadcasting, 1: 274-275 e 2: 94-98; Czitrom, Media and the American Mind, p. 85; MacDonald, Don't Touch That Dial!, p. 28; Marquis, "Written on the Wind," p. 405; George A. Willey, "End of An Era: The Daytime
Radio Serial", *Journal of Broadcasting* (Spring 1961): 97-115. In a 1942 survey, the B.B.C. New York Office reported that 20,000,000 American women listened to daytime serials. (Letter from B.B.C. New York Office - Research department, to Gorham, October 27, 1942, BBC WAC, E2/439/1); Marquis states that the average Crossley rating for soap operas was 4.5%, "a matter of some 600,000." Willey does not give data, but he states that "in size, the audience numbered approximately half of the women who were home during the daytime hours." However, all seem to agree with Barnouw's summary: "without question they were a smashing business success, contributing to the growing power of network radio." (*History of Broadcasting*, 2: 98.)

(572) *B.B.C. Handbook*, 1939. See also Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 2: 169: "The last development in Drama before 1939 and the one that again pointed the way forward to the world after the war was the development of the dramatic serial programme, not along American soap opera lines but as a genuine 'middlebrow' form of entertainment, seldom sinking lower, sometimes rising higher." Serials based on *The Three Musketeers* and other classics were produced in a large number. "In a lighter vein, the detective serial 'Send for Paul Temple' was also broadcast for the first time in 1938 and soon enjoyed a big popularity."

(573) Gorham, *Sound and Fury*, p. 106. For a history of "Front Line Family" see Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 3: 404 ("Among the other programmes [of the N.A.S.] which made their mark, were Front Line Family ... which, like all the B.B.C. serials which were to follow it, had its addicts as well as its listeners." In May 1942, Briggs recounts, "Front Line Family" was one of the most popular B.B.C. programmes in the U.S. and in June of the same year German broadcasters produced a programme called 'Our Version of Front Line Family.'") David Cardiff also mentions it as an example of the Americanization of the B.B.C. (unpublished).

(574) *Radio Times*, April 18, 1941.
I have dealt with the discussion over the crisis which seemed to have exhausted Alan Melville's creativity in September 1941 and Gorham's proposal to employ an American script-writer to substitute in Valeria Camporesi, "Alla scoperta delle frontiere culturali: la B.B.C. in guerra di fronte all'americanizzazione," Passato e presente 18 (1988), pp. 71-86.


George A. Willey, "The Soap Operas and the War," Journal of Broadcasting 7 (Fall 1963), pp. 351-352. Willey's conclusion is that "daytime radio serials fell far short of its potential to inform, inspire or motivate" during the war. "At the same time," he adds, "it becomes apparent that audiences which listened to the most popular serials were provided with a considerable amount of information which was accurate and important."

See Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 225. As Melville himself acknowledged, in 1940-41 his impressing endeavour was rendered easier by the dramatic events of war, the bombings in particular. "Over these 27 weeks," he wrote in September 1941, "we have been trying to show what was happening to the ordinary man and woman in the front line. When we started the programme, the 'family' were really in the front line, and it was easy to make compelling programmes and good propaganda points out of the wealth of material which came to us when we were being blitzed almost nightly ... In the past few months things have been more difficult but we have got in a great quantity of ... useful points stressing such things as our R.A.F. training, Home Guard activities, factory production drive as the not unimportant fact that people in London were still living their fairly normal lives, that we were not hungry nor depressed ...
so on." (Letter from Melville to Miss Kallinn, Russian Intelligence, September 30, 1941, BBC WAC, E17/69.)

(581) "Critical Analysis of Front Line Family", October 23, 1941, BBC WAC, R19/1047/1a.

(582) "Front Line Family has been played back to some panels of experts on the American audience, and the general view seemed to be that it would hold its place with similar programmes of American origin." (Audience Research Unit, "Programme Reaction Report - Front Line Family," August 28, 1942, BBC WAC, R19/1047/1b.)


(584) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from J. H. Davenport to Director of Empire Programme, May 11, 1942, BBC WAC, R19/1047/1b - partially quoted in Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 404, see n. 43. The strongest opposition to the series was in the African colonies. "Dislike of the programme does not however seem to be an 'exile' trait, since it is not apparent in the West Indies and South America, and the programme has had to be reinstated in the Eastern Service because of insistent listener demand in India - a unique experience in the Empire Service." (Audience Research Unit, "Programme Reaction Report - Front Line Family," August 28, 1942, BBC WAC, R19/1047/1b.)

(585) See Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 132: "The first American adviser on my staff was Ted Wells Church, a very experienced radio man ... he continued the good work ... of making everybody realise the vital importance of smooth presentation and dead accurate timings in any broadcasts for America."

(586) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Church to Gorham, January 26, 1942, BBC WAC E1/141.


(588) Basil Woon had taken over from Melville as script-writer. When his work was criticized and unfavourably compared to the American scripts, he reacted strongly. "One reason American scripts are better is the fact that they are the
work of teams and often 'gagged up' by highly paid gagmen in addition... This system however has an obvious drawback. The more professional and polished the script, the less it is apt to reflect real life." (Letter from Woon, May 11, 1942, BBC WAC, R19/1047/1b – written in reply to "Front Line Family of April 6th, 1942. Comments of Mr. Schenk", forwarded to London by the B.B.C. New York Office. Mr. Schenk was a famous American radio script-writer.) The assumption was that the two countries were different and this difference was correctly reflected in their radio programmes.


(592) Simon of Wythenshawe, BBC from Within, p. 95.

(593) As Gorham has pointed out the Overseas Service as a whole had a strong influence over the Light Programme: "The Light Programme," he has written, "provided the novelty element in the B.B.C.'s post-war plan, and for its first five years it was directed by people who had come from the Overseas Services and had not acquired the traditional outlook of Broadcasting House. It introduced methods better known to listeners overseas than here, such as the daily dramatic serial." (Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 224.)

(594) R. A. Rendall, "Visit to Canada and the United States, October-November 1940," December 19, 1940, E15/180. Briggs has quoted excerpts from this memorandum (see History of Broadcasting, 3: 404-405) but he is only interested in the contribution it made to the role of the B.B.C. in the projection of Britain in the United States.


(596) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 164.

(597) See BBC WAC, E2/19/1 and E1/153. It was the Bennett Committee on Anglo-American Relations, chaired by Lord Bennett.
(598) Letter from Ivor Tyler, a member of the Committee, to L. Gilliam, September 10, 1941, BBC WAC, El/153. A month later, the Committee specified its requests further: "Mr. Gilliam asked how far the Committee wished characters chosen to be made attractive, even at the cost of slurring over undesirable aspects. Sir Kenneth Clark said that while the Committee was not expecting the B.B.C. to tamper with truth, it did partly exist to counteract prevailing unfavourable impressions of America, and this object would hardly be served if broadcasts did not on balance leave a favourable impression." (Committee To Explain U.S.A. in G.B. Minutes, October 6, 1941, BBC WAC, El/153.)

(599) On this point, the report concluded "the main thing that emerges is the way in which people look upon films as a form of entertainment and as a process of unreality." In this sense, films were seen as representing "a sort of dream stereotype from America." (MO, FR 1095, March 16, 1942.) In an undated document filed by the B.B.C. as "Countries: America. British Attitudes, c. 1943" (BBC WAC, El/129) reporting the results of a survey conducted by the British Institute of Public Opinion it is stated: "There are two major (and obvious) conclusions which emerge from the B.I.P.O.'s study of British attitudes towards Americans and America: (1) the level of ignorance, concerning America, its institutions, and people is extremely high; (2) the majority of the British people are well-disposed towards Americans and many aspects of American life."

(600) LR 296, July 8, 1941, BBC WAC, R9/9/5.

(601) LR 586, January 22, 1942, BBC WAC, R9/9/6. Cooke was second in the popularity list and Elmer Davies third.

(602) For the diffused reverberations of the Government's worries on British feelings towards Americans see Bridson's Memo to Assistant Director Features, April 11, 1942: "I have heard this last week or so - and not for the first time - that the antagonism felt by British troops to America as a whole is a matter of grave concern to the Ministry of Information, if not to the War Office itself," BBC WAC, El/153. On British people's attitudes towards American

(603) The Committee met once a month. Its members were: R. A. Randall, Assistant Controller (Overseas Service); G. Barnes, Director of Talks; J. E. C. Langlam, Assistant Director Programme Planning; R. Eckersley; M. Gorham, North American Service Director; and A. E. Barker, D. F. Bridson, and M. Gilbert as external advisers (see BBC WAC R34/687).

(604) Many were suggesting that it was the only way to have B.B.C. programmes on the air in the United States at peak listening hours. See Programme Planning Meeting, "Sponsored Programmes in Overseas Service," August 13, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/879.


(606) See "American Summary - October 1939" from B.B.C. North American Representative; N.A.R. Airmail Report n.1, April 29, 1941; N.A.R. Airmail Report n. 2, June 12, 1941, BBC WAC, E1/212/2. This was also the line taken by the American Division of the Ministry of Information, see Ministry of Information. American Division, "Note on Broadcasting," December 13, 1939, BBC WAC, E2/19/1.

(607) The members of the staff working in Eastbound operations were: Michael Barkway (News Department), Roy Lockwood (Production Department), Fuller (European Department); while Stephen Fry (Traffic Department), David (Research Department), and somebody not yet appointed in March 1943 for the Publicity Department. Besides, new offices were set up in San Francisco, Washington, Chicago and Ottawa. (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from North American Director to All Staff, March 18, 1943, BBC WAC, E1/153; see also "Report on
Visit to U.S.," by Laurence Gilliam, April 5, 1943, in E15/76.) Since October 1943 the Research department of the B.B.C. New York Office also began to publish monthly an "American Radio Newsletter" where information on political attitudes of the American people were intermingled with flashes on the best selling programmes of the season. (See BBC WAC, E1/112/1.) The B.B.C. effort to project America must be considered very successful as the U.S. State Department itself acknowledged in 1946. "In bringing something of the feel and character of my country through radio to Britain," wrote Henry David, one of the B.B.C. American advisers during the war, "the B.B.C. has done a job so adequate that our State Department's International Information Service does not plan to broadcast programs in English to Britain." (FO Minute, January 22, 1946, FO 371/51627.) The decision must have brought the greatest relief to the B.B.C.


(609) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 192.


(611) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 573. "It took time to build up the team of B.B.C. correspondents," Briggs explains. "By 1948, however, Patrick Smith was sending brilliant despatches covering the Communist coup d'état in Prague and Thomas Cadett was analysing with great skill from Paris the confused politics of post-war France. Christopher Seerpell in Italy and Leonard Miall in America always caught the immediacy of great moments, as did Thompson the immediacy of the great and not so great moments in Parliament."

(612) See for instance note from A. P. Ryan (Controller (News Co-ordinator) to A. E. Baker (Overseas News Editor), April 18, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/188.

(613) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, September 18, 1942, BBC WAC, E1/201/2.

Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel*, p. 79, 97. Murrow's comment had been occasioned by the "Transatlantic Call" programme broadcast on the B.B.C. North American Service. At the time Bridson produced feature programmes for the Overseas Services.

B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from Bridson to Assistant Director features, April 11, 1942, BBC WAC, E1/153. Bridson was suggesting that he might be the right man in New York.

D. Boyd, "Report on My American Tour," April 23, 1942, BBC WAC E15/22. Gorham confirmed Boyd's impressions: "Americans at my playbacks have expressed surprise at the articulateness of John Londoner, and said that American men-in-the-street would not talk so well - but the danger here is that American listeners may not believe the interviews are genuine." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from M. Gorham to R. A. Rendall, April 26, 1942, BBC WAC, E15/22.)

Note to Director of Talks, June 4, 1942, BBC WAC, E1/208/2.

B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo signed by G. D. Adams (Director of Programme Planning), February 27, 1942, BBC WAC, E1/109. A letter from the Overseas Liaison sketchily summarized what the programmes for American forces amounted to in March 1942: "A further weekly half-hour in the Forces Programme is to be devoted to the entertainment of the American troops, and a selection of records of American variety programmes is required for this purpose. This will be in addition to the Jack Benny and Bob Hope programmes already in use." According to this report, the American army authorities were enthusiastic of the job. (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from Overseas Liaison to North American Director, March 20, 1942, BBC WAC R34/188). The B.B.C. however found it a demanding task; when, for instance, the necessity arose to broadcast recordings of American high spots programmes in Norther Ireland at a good evening listening hour for the U.S. soldiers stationed there the same Director of Programme Planning, G. D. Adams, warned that "this will create alarm and
despondency in Variety Department, partly because they will fear an outcry from British artists who will complain that they are using American recordings instead of making use of their services." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from G. D. Adams to Controller (Programmes), May 21, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/913.)

(620) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from L. Gilliam to Assistant Director of Talks, August 10, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/913.

(621) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from C. Madden to Controller (Programmes), January 10, 1941, BBC WAC, R34/188.

(622) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from J. Watt to Controller (Programmes), July 14, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/918/3.

(623) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 567. Watt's note on Hillyard's proposed visit to America is in BBC WAC, E15/105. Hillyard also wrote an article on "Impressions of radio presentation in the U.S.A.," December 31, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/918/3.

(624) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, from P. M. Dixon to Cecil Madden, December 24, 1943. Madden agreed and added: "We MUST bring over some American comedians if B.B.C. entertainment is to survive." (December 25, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/918/3.)

(625) Radio Times, February 13, 1942.

(626) A year later Hal Block, an American script-writer who had come to help the B.B.C. variety staff, was asked to explain to the British audience the creative history of the two artists, by then already extremely popular. (See Radio Times, May 21, 1943.) A year earlier, Tom Harrisson complained: "Now I.T.M.A. has gone, there is no really good comedy Programme on the air regularly for 'Hi Gang,' with Ben Lyon playing a fool to Vic Oliver and Bebe Daniels ... has gone too. We deserve our first-class laugh once a week, surely. At present all the B.B.C. can give us is recordings of Bob Hope from the U.S.A." (T. Harrisson, "Radio," May 11, 1942, MO-FR 1952.)

(627) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 567. When the programme started
it was compered by Vic Oliver, later substituted by Leslie Mitchell. (See BBC WAC, R34/919/3.)

(628) In September J. E. Langham, Assistant Director of Programme Planning, announced cheerfully that "we might be able to accommodate at the present time one more recorded programme from the U.S.A. ... I have since had a word with D.V. [Director of Variety] about this, and we should be most grateful if you could negotiate a Burns and Allen series. From all you said this seems to us to be the kind of programme which is likely to have the most general appeal."

(September 6, 1942, BBC WAC, R34/188.)

(629) As Briggs has pointed out: "The idea behind it was not only to capture the large audience of Band Waggon but for the first time deliberately to produce British programmes with American-style quick-fire patter. 'Basically the idea,' Kavanagh [the script writer] has written, 'and it was not a very good one, was to create an English version of the Burns and Allen Show.' It is fascinating that in war-time circumstances the Englishness of the programme was to be its outstanding characteristic." (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 118.) For an outline of the programme's history, see Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 108-109; Ted Kavanagh, The ITMA Years, London: Futura Publications, 1975 (1st ed., 1974).

(630) Radio Times, April 18, 1941. Indeed, as Briggs has maintained, "there were to be two distinct strands in war-time variety, one essentially British provincial and one American." (Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 315.)

(631) Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 200. Cecil Madden proposed the shows for transmission in the North American Service; they are, he maintained, "the best and brightest shows put out by the B.B.C. variety for a long time ... They are done with an audience so they have audience laughter and reactions." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from Cecil Madden to Assistant Director Overseas Service, June 9, 1940, BBC WAC, R34/918/2.)

(632) Radio Times, August 9, 1940. The Lyons were once again on the air in the
1950s, this time with their son and daughter, in the programme "Life with the Lyons," a comedy serial where the American quick-fire patter was associated with a rather British kind of humour. (Cf. episode n. 1, November 14, 1952, B.B.C. Light Programme, NSA, MX 18477-B.)

(632) F. Greene, "Future Programs from USA," May 18, 1938 (BBC WAC E1/207/1).

Besides, Greene personally preferred the informative type of programme. In the same document in fact he would explicitly say that he was prepared to sacrifice "any number of dance bands and variety shows" to a good commentary series.

(634) When in September 1949 Mass Observation asked its panelists to state their favourite radio personalities (recording the opinions of those who knew at least 5 of the performers whose names were suggested), Bebe Daniels, Ben Lyon and Vic Oliver were among the seven stars or group of stars mentioned. ("Radio Personalities. Panel Favourites," September 1949, MO-FR 3162.) For a history of the Lyons' broadcasting experience in Britain listen also to "Bebe and Ben. Tribute for their Silver Wedding 1930-1955", broadcast on Home Programme on June 6, 1955 (producer: T. Ronald), NSA.

(635) Gorham, Sound and Fury, p. 133. See also Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 645-649 where reference is made to the whole of the American broadcasting strategies in Europe.


(637) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from P. Hillyard to R. Lockwood, August 28, 1943, BBC WAC, E1/139/3.

(638) B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from Collins to Controller (Overseas Service), December 29, 1943, BBC WAC, R34/918/3. In January, Rendall sent out a similar note: "Personally," he wrote, "I find it rather shocking that it should be suggested that the only way to clean up our shows is to pay more for them and make them more American and less British." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo to Controller (Overseas Service), January 4, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/919/3.)

(640) Ibidem, p. 57.


(643) The awkward relations between the American and British film industries have been studied extensively. The book by Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street constitutes a valuable work of reference (Margaret Dickinson - Sarah Street, Cinema and State. The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-1984, London: British Film Institute, 1985.).


(647) Programme Policy Minute, August 29, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/188.

(648) The memorandum dealt mainly with the possibilities open for the B.B.C. to have its programme re-broadcast in North America. See Lindsay Wellington, "Post-War Broadcasting To and From U.S.A.," September 13, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/575.

(649) From the point of view of the B.B.C. general policies, the decisions taken to limit the percentage of American material had important consequences on the Westbound side of the North American policy of the Corporation. In some cases if the B.B.C. dropped a U.S. programme it immediately lost the corresponding space for its American rebroadcastings. This happened for instance with "Transatlantic Call". (See letter from Controller (Programmes) to
Director General, August 25, 1944, BBC WAC E1/109.) Gorham stated clearly his worries on the matter when Haley started the discussion. "From the viewpoint of the B.B.C. operations in America as a whole," he wrote, "our Eastbound work—news, talks, and features—provides a solid basis for our claim that American stations should be interested in taking our westbound programs. Though this factor should not affect individual decisions on American material in the Home Service, it is nevertheless true that radio imports and exports must tend to equalise out, and that the scale of our overseas operations cannot therefore be planned without some regard to the domestic outlet we can provide for programs from abroad." ("Comments by N.A.D. on the Director General's Policy Directive Regarding 'U.S. MATERIAL IN B.B.C. PROGRAMS' (August 16, 1944)," September 11, 1944, BBC WAC, E1/109.) Nicolls, who agreed in principle with Haley and shared his worries—"Americanisation," he wrote, "is a real danger in the entertainment programmes and it is possible that the B.B.C. will adopt a long term policy of resisting it within reasonable limits, and substitution of English material, e.g. in the almost complete American monopoly of dance music"—had a disarming proposal to counteract Gorham's fears; the B.B.C., he thought should ask "whether the intercommunication object, as such, is not achieved as well or better by the Americans sending their own programmes back from Britain to America, rather than by our doing programmes for them." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from Nicolls to D.G., October 4, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/575.)


(651) "Post-War Broadcasting To and From America. Note of Points Agreed," December 4, 1944, BBC WAC, R34/575.

(652) "Post-War Programme Set-Up. Note by Senior Controller," December 21, 1944 (revised April 23, 1945 in accordance with D.G.'s preliminary decisions), BBC WAC, R34/574. (Quoted in Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 51.)
The literature on the policy pursued by the U.S. Department of State to defend and promote the already strong presence of the American film industry in Europe is abundant. On the British case, see for instance, Street - Dickinson, Cinema and the State, pp. 170-198.

See Programme Board Minute, October 30, 1945: "Having regard to the dollar situation, it would seem to be of paramount importance for all eastbound activities to be limited strictly to known requirements of actual commissions" (BBC WAC, E1/210/2.)

"In the first post-war years almost everything was rationed." (Arthur Marwick, British Society since 1945, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 74.) It would have been odd if broadcasting had enjoyed a different fate.

For the negotiations over the destinies of Radio Luxembourg after the war see chapter 2.

B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo from M. Gorham to Senior Controller, May 28, 1945, BBC WAC, E1/109. Gorham took over the Light Programme when it was launched in July 1945.

Letter to Controller (Home Service), July 26, 1948, BBC WAC, E1/225/1.


In February 1944 the B.B.C. refused to broadcast on its Overseas Service American recordings which the Office of War Information was offering. "I think that this suggestion should be viewed very carefully," Norman Collins warned, "as the motives behind the scheme are not I think as disinterested as they might at first glance appear to be." (To Assistant Controller (Overseas), February 3, 1944, BBC WAC, E1/109.)

J. MacAlpine, to Controller (Overseas Service), September 23, 1946, BBC
(664) Letter from Gorham to Mr. Reid, July 23, 1945, BBC WAC, E1/201/1.
(672) Ibid., p. 71. A puzzling enquiry into the origins of the title "The Brains' Trust" was pursued by the B.B.C. in the early 1950s. The American Broadcasting Company had announced its intention to produce a television programme entitled "The Brains Trust" and had therefore written to the B.B.C. wondering whether it was B.B.C. property. The answer is quite amazing, considering that the programmes had remained on the air until 1949. "This programme," the B.B.C. report stated, "appeared to have started as a light educational broadcast for the Forces Programme on an idea by Howard Thomas and Douglas Cleverden based on American 'Information please' ... It is not clear
from file where 'Brains Trust' as a description originated but imagine this also was American term." ("Notes on 'The Brains Trust' for Overseas Liaison Officer," February 1953, BBC WAC, E1/104/2.)

(673) Quiz programmes were always defined on the basis of their relation to an American model. In December 1951 the Controller (Light Programme), Kenneth Adam, reported to the Board that "Among 'quizzes', 'One Minute Please' established its right to a new series in the New Year and 'False Evidence' shows signs of like success. Both these variations on the question and answer theme are British bred, not American importations, and sprang from the fertile brain of a member of the Variety Department." ("Report to the Board," December 4, 1951, BBC WAC, R34/651/1.)


(675) See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 4: 64, 1011.


(677) See chapter 2.

(678) See BBC WAC, E1/202/1-7 (1946-1954). These bulletins were very similar to the pre-war "American Radio Newsletter" and contained a great deal of information on B.B.C. rebroadcastings but also general reviews on the latest U.S. radio productions.

(679) Radio Times, June 28, 1946.


(681) Similarly to what had happened and is happening in cinema history.

(682) See Marwick, British Society since 1945, p. 145.

(683) "Chief Engineer's Visit to the United States," January 4, 1934, BBC WAC,
Three years earlier on this same subject the Radio Times had declared:
"We are un-American enough to prefer to think that if a man wants physical
jerks he will jump to them to his own accord and not demand that the whole
nation jumps with him." (Radio Times, April 11, 1930.)

See for instance Radio Times, October 25, 1935: "Studio audiences - a
delicate subject in this country! - seem to have created no controversy in the
States. I gathered that the artists and listeners are thoroughly in favour of
them," wrote Henry Hall, the Director of the B.B.C. Dance Orchestra, reporting
on a recent visit to America. As for the controversy see the Radio Times,
August 22, 1930; January 9, 1931; August 12, 1932. Studio audiences were
eventually introduced during the war. See Gorham, Broadcasting, p. 214.

See Minute Home Broadcasting Committee, September 5, 1949, BBC WAC,
R34/595/1.

Lambert, Ariel and All His Quality, p. 307.

See Radio Times, April 3, 1942, which announced the beginning of a Bob
Hope series to be broadcast on Sundays. "These typically American shows," the
B.B.C. magazine assured will be adapted "for consumption over here."

See Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 2: 118, 3: 564.

Gorham, Sound, p. 171.

Radio Times, July 3, 1931. The identification of native with natural
should be marked out as a blatant attempt at myth-construction - almost as if
Maine had read Barthes' Mythologies. Equally interesting is the casual way in
which he uses the term "strange."

Brewer, Spice of Variety, pp. 155-156. Indeed the misuse of words was
employed as a humouristic device in many B.B.C. comedy shows. It was however
widely used also by American comedians (by "Amos 'n' Andy," for instance). For
a general overview of the traditional component of B.B.C. radio comedy see Cardiff, "Mass Middlebrow Laughter."


(696) "Joke Report: Interviews with Comedians, Writers, Cartoonists; Analysis of Magazines and Music Hall Jokes; Film Competition Jokes," June 27, 1940, MO-FR 229. "The purpose of the survey was to gain background material on the subject of humour ... The method combined interviews with comedians, joke writers, cartoonists, etc. with analysis of joke magazines and reactions to music hall jokes. The result in a competition in the Sunday Dispatch in which readers were asked to submit the funniest situations they had seen in films were also used." On the matter of what subjects are funny, the survey indicated that "ill health, the unpleasant side of sex, and domestic affairs, are almost invariably the most popular."

(697) Radio Times, November 24, 1933.

(698) New York Sun, March 19, 1939, BBC WAC, E1/190.

(699) See chapter 5.

(700) Hal Block, "My Impression of Radio in Britain," [1943], BBC WAC, R34/917. Block also wrote an article for the Radio Times on "Radio Comedy in the U.S.A." where he further described this difference. "Bob Hope, typical gag-comedian," he explained, "cracks his jokes in a machine-gun fashion and lets the laughs fall where they may." At the beginning of his career, "Bob's cracks were so fast that people would laugh at one joke two jokes later." (Radio Times, May 21, 1943.)

(701) Ibidem.


(705) *Radio Times*, September 7, 1934. Actually, the networks' aversion to recording owed much also to the fear of cheap competition (for a general overview of the question see references in chapter 5). For the overwhelming popularity of outside broadcasts in U.S. radio see also *Radio Pictorial*, September 7, 1934.

(706) *Radio Times*, October 5, 1934.


(710) This seems to be the main cause affecting the divergent development of broadcasting news policies in Britain and the United States. In the United States the press-radio agreement had disintegrated in the early 1930s: "the Press-Radio War, which ran from 1931 to 1934, stopped the networks from obtaining wire service copy for several years and, more importantly, caused the development of news departments at both N.B.C. and C.B.S." (Hosley, *As Good As Any*, p. 18.) See also Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*, pp. 56-58.


(712) See the discussion on B.B.C. news reported in chapter 5 above.


(714) Letter from N.A.S. Organiser to Assistant Controller Overseas and Empire Services, March 5, 1952, BBC WAC, R34/851/2. During the war a Miss Ebsen of the B.B.C. New York Office maintained that "the B.B.C. news programs are now coming more and more to the public attention - chiefly because they are considered the
most reliable — and I might add, have none of the hysteria which is so wearing, especially in these days. These programs are acting somewhat as a soothing antidote to the quite emotional presentations of the American news commentators." (B.B.C. Internal Circulating Memo, June 19, 1940, BBC WAC, E2/503/1.)

(715) Evelyn Ticehurst, Planning and Liaison Assistant, N.A.S., "Report on American Visit," April 30, 1951, BBC WAC, E15/3. In 1953 the author of a "Report on Some Aspects of Radio and Television in the United States" for the B.B.C., Jack Ashley insisted upon the same idea: the networks' commentators, he wrote, "tend to be colourful rather than informative and engender heat rather than light. There are some balanced and reflective men among them ... But I would say that the balance is overwhelmingly in favour of the dangerous and irresponsible demagogues of the air." (December 16, 1953, BBC WAC, E15/3.) This difference in approach had a reverberation in the comparisons frantically pursued by the British after the war between the B.B.C. External Services and the Voice of America news policies. See, for instance, BBC WAC, E2/577/1-3, E2/578, E2/580, E2/607, E3/110. The basic criticism which the B.B.C. officials moved to their supposed ally was summarized in 1950 by G. Tarjan, the Assistant Head of the B.B.C. Central European Service: "Their basic attitudes to facts," he stated, "is governed just as much by their obvious desire to startle by the swiftness of their news as by their wish to be accurate and the compromise particularly nearer the microphone is often made to the detriment of accuracy."

However, he also reported, "reading some of their scripts I was struck by the utter simplicity of the language, clearly reflecting a deliberate attempt to write for radio." (G. Tarjan, "Tour of Duty in the U.S. and Canada," December 12, 1950, BBC WAC, E15/213.)

(716) Briggs, History of Broadcasting, 3: 49, 47.


(718) In particular D. G. Bridson, one of the leading producer of feature
programmes, see chapter 5. Hilda Matheson, then B.B.C. Director of Talk, agreed that feature programmes "represent indeed the real core of broadcasting."


(719) John Drakakis, ed., British Radio Drama, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 7. This notion of a "national theatre of the air" is convincingly questioned by David Wade in the final essay of Drakakis's volume. His objections however, while undoubtedly legitimate from the point of view of a critical examination of the B.B.C. actual drama output, do not invalidate the use of that definition within an analysis of the B.B.C.'s own attitude towards radio play productions. Therefore, if it is true, as Wade maintains, that radio "provides an 'International Theatre of the Air,'" a part of its output every year being devoted to the classics of world theatre, to productions of plays by living foreign dramatists and even in recent years to the transmission of productions made in foreign studios," (conditions which would apply at least partially also to the earlier history of the B.B.C.) it does not follow that those productions did not represent what the corporation saw as a national theatre of the air.


(723) See chapter 4. "The disturbance of traditional principles of dramatic design, which had relied upon the strictly sequential relationship between plot and character within an action which was temporally constrained, helped to
isolate some of the more intricate elements of aesthetic structure." (Drakakis, ed., *British Radio Drama*, p. 5.)

(724) Ibid., p. 4.

(725) Simon of Wythenshawe, *BBC from Within*, p. 96. As Martyn Bond has shown, however, these self-indulgent statements should be read within the U.S. vs. U.K. broadcasting framework. See above.

(726) Gielgud, "Considerations Relevant to Broadcasting Drama Based upon Experience in the Years 1929 to 1948," June 19, 1948, BBC WAC, R19/276. "Wherever I went in the States," a B.B.C. official reported in April 1951, "the demand for B.B.C. drama was very great .. There is no doubt we could place an almost unlimited quantity of drama, in the form of sixty or thirty minute plays." (Evelyn Ticehurst, Planning and Liaison Assistant N.A.S., "Report on American Visit," April 30, 1951, BBC WAC, E1/291/2. Gielgud's memorandum was produced within the general climate of weighing in the balance prompted by the Beveridge Committee's inquiries.

(727) "The last development in Drama before 1939," Briggs reconstructed, "and the one that again pointed the way forward to the world after the war was the development of the dramatic serial programme, not along American soap-opera lines but as a genuine 'middlebrow' form of entertainment, seldom sinking lower, sometimes rising higher." (Briggs, *History of Broadcasting*, 2: 169.) The most popular serial was at that time the Paul Temple detective series.

(728) Bond states that "in a 1958 B.B.C. survey, radio plays headed the sound audience's popularity list, 33% of the 'sound only' public 'particularly liking' them, 44% liking them, 16% being indifferent to them, and 7% disliking them, while nobody said they 'particularly disliked' radio drama." (Bond, "Radio Drama," pp. 485-486.)

(729) Simon of Wythenshawe, *BBC from Within*, p. 95. In an equally smug note on drama policy, the Director of Home broadcasting, Beverly Nicolls, maintained: "In the course of its existence the Drama Department under Mr. Gielgud has
succeeded beyond all expectations in two things: (1) the creation of a new mammoth audience for drama, and (2) the raising of public taste." (B. E. Nicolls, "Note on Drama Policy," May 5, 1950, BBC WAC, R19/290/6.)


(732) Williams, Culture and Society, p. 311.

(733) This explanation is strengthened by the existence of a perfectly specular image of British broadcasting as an alternative "model" to the American which recurs in the history of U.S. radio. See the concluding paragraphs in chapter 2 above.

(734) See the interesting definition of "Americanization" (italics in the text) given by Frank Costigliola in the introduction to his book on U.S. relations with Europe in the aftermath of World War I. "Contemporaries," Costigliola writes, "used Americanization to refer to both the U.S. 'cultural penetration' of Europe and the overlapping process of Europe's indigenous modernization."


(735) For the definition of "invention" as utilized here, see Eric J. Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

1. Unpublished Sources

British Broadcasting Corporation, Written Archives Centre, Reading.
National Sound Archive, London.
The Tom Harrisson - Mass Observation Archive, Brighton.
Private interviews with Harman Grisewood (September 11-12, 1987); and Leonard Miall (August 12, 1987).

Library of Congress - Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Washington, D.C.
The Oral History Collection of Columbia University, New York: "Radio Pioneers Project" records.


BBC Handbooks, 1928-1952
Broadcasting, 1935-1946
The Listener, 1929-1956
The Radio Pictorial, 1933-1939
The Radio Times, 1923-1953

3. Official Papers

Cmd. 777 "Report of the Imperial Wireless Telegraphy Committee, 1919-1920"
Cmd. 1951 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1923"
Cmd. 2599 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1925"
Cmd. 5091 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1935"

Cmd. 8116 "Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1949"

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series (Hansard)

4. Printed Sources (Memories and Commentaries by Contemporaries)


Bartlett, Vernon O. This is My Life. London: Chatto & Windus, 1937.


Lambert R. S. *Ariel and All His Quality*. London: Gollancz, 1940.


Woon, Basil. Eyes West (Reminiscences). London: Peter Davies, 1940.


5. **Secondary Sources**


Hobsbawm, Eric J. *The Jazz Scene,* London 1961


Media, Culture and Society 11 (1989). Special issue on "Broadcasting and the Public Sphere."


