

The Empire Service: the voice, the discourse of the master and ventriloquism

Andrew Hill

**CRESC
The Open University
a.hill@open.ac.uk**

The BBC's Empire Service began short-wave broadcasts on 12 December 1932, from Daventry, England, with the purpose of providing a radio service for the colonies and dominions of the British Empire - and as such constituting the initial version of what would become the BBC World Service¹.

Whilst the Empire Service has been discussed in terms of the general history of the BBC (see most notably Briggs (1995)), with the exception of McKenzie's (1987) overview chapter it has been the subject of little scholarly attention in its own right. The concern of this paper is to examine the light cast by psychoanalytically derived perspectives on the voice and the terms in which the voice figures in regard to Lacan's conception of the discourse of the master, on principally the political functions of the Empire Service - from its commencement at the close of 1932 through to the outbreak of the Second World War (which saw the service reconfigured as the Overseas Service and coming to play a rather different role than it had done); and secondly on the BBC's initial foreign language services (commencing in 1938) which developed out of the Empire Service.

The voice, the discourse of the master, the lonely listener

The voice constituted the defining means by which the Empire Service was experienced by listeners across the globe. Whilst music and noise (or 'interference') constituted other significant aspects of the experience of this service (their relationship to the voice will be discussed in due course), the voice, as broadcast by the Empire Service served to not only provide the means by which the spoken content of the service was experienced by listeners, but to provide the service with a distinct identity, and, in regard to the broadcasting of music (the realm, beyond lyrical content, of the non-verbal), to locate this material in the context of this service.

At the basis of understanding how the voice as carried by the Empire Service was experienced by listeners stands the dual status of the voice as Lacan positions it:

¹ The launch of the Empire Service was preceded by experimental short wave transmissions ('5SW') from 5 November 1927, that made use of the BBC domestic service's programme material.

as at once a catalyst of desire (and hence as one of the paradigmatic manifestations of that which Lacan designates ‘the objet petit a’) (see for example [1975] 1998:126), and at the same time as a medium of authority, as the ‘living’ dimension of the Symbolic order (the order of language), the superego or the Law (the legal-linguistic framework of the social order) (see for example [1966] 2006:572-573)².

Sartre, in his discussion of ‘the radio broadcast’ developed in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* ([1960] 1976:270-276), delineates the vectors of voice as it is experienced by the radio listener, emphasising above all the way in which the listener is, ‘passive in relation to what is being said’ (ibid.:271), with the radio voice conceived of in the following terms:

The broadcaster’s voice ... is in principle mystifying: it is based on the reciprocity of discourse, and therefore on a human relation, but it is really a reifying relation in which the voice is given as praxis and constitutes the listener as the object of praxis; in short it is a univocal relation of interiority, similar to that of the organism acting on the material environment, but one in which I, as an inert object, am subjected as inorganic matter to the human work of the voice (ibid.:272).

For Sartre then the radio voice operates via a one-way process, addressing the listener in the terms it sees fit and neither requiring nor soliciting a response³. Indeed, as John Durham Peters (1999:206) makes clear in his study of the history of the idea of communication, the monological status of the radio voice was well recognised by early broadcasters, anxious about the limits this would place upon the popularity of the medium. (At the same time, as Sartre contends, the radio voice does not even require the individual listener to listen to it for it to achieve a sense of being listened to, with the individual listener aware that if they switch off, others can still be listening - a conception of the voice that accords with Jacques Alain Miller’s (2006) development of Lacan’s notion of the gaze as reaching beyond ‘the eye’ (the individual subject’s point of view) into an awareness of the Other’s field of vision (including the subject’s own place in this), as applied to aurality).

² See Dolar (2006) for an overview of the voice as lure (ibid.:28, 39, 80) and as a source of authority (ibid.:40, 52, 62-63, 76, 99).

³ Sartre notes the capacity of listeners to respond to a broadcast by for example writing-in, whilst contending that this is only likely to have an effect if more than one listener does so - as such the listener by themselves remains practically mute in their capacity to respond back to the broadcast voice itself (1976:271). (Radio phone-ins present another, later, means by which listeners can respond to what they hear).

The conception of the voice as carried by the Empire Service speaking in this unilinear fashion to the listener provides an initial suggestion of the terms in which the functioning of the Empire Service accords with ‘the discourse of the master’, one of the four discourses Lacan develops in *Seminar XVII* ([1969-70] 2007) identified as structuring social ties or linkages. Sartre in his discussion makes explicit this linking function of radio, noting its capacity to, ‘establish indirect bonds of alterity between individuals who are unaware of each other as such’ (1976.:275). In the discussion around the establishment of this service this linking function was identified as a primary objective, with at the Imperial Conference of 1930, such a service argued for in terms of its, ‘strengthening the ties’ between parts of the Empire⁴, a sentiment echoed by the BBC’s first Director General, John Reith in a speech broadcast on the opening of the Service, in which, broadcasting is identified as having come to constitute, a ‘connecting and co-ordinating link between the scattered parts of the British Empire’⁵.

In 1932 this linking function was perceived as possessing quite definite limits though, being confined to those British emigrants (or ancestors of emigrants), who have more recently been labelled as constituting ‘the British diaspora’⁶, and played a primary role in governing, administering and protecting the Empire, as opposed to the principal group with which they are contrasted - the local indigenous inhabitants of the Empire, as they appear in the BBC’s archives - ‘the natives’⁷. As Reith made explicit in the discussions leading up to the establishment of the Empire Service, the role of such a service was to be, in ‘providing the white inhabitants of the Crown Colonies (and India) with the home linkages that are so essential to them’⁸. (The position of the inhabitants of the Dominions in this formula is somewhat ambiguous, reflecting the shifting status of the Dominions within the Empire in this period - an issue that will be returned to at various junctures in this paper). In its associations with this linking function, the Empire Service reflects the fact that by the first half of the twentieth century, as John Darwin attests, ‘the cohesion of the British Imperial system ... was the central problem of Imperial politics’ (1999:64), with the anxiety around the Empire’s break-up foregrounded at the century’s opening by the Boer War. As such the Empire Service came to be regarded as constituting the latest in the succession of media that Harold Innis ([1950] 1972) identifies as playing a crucial role in the development of imperial projects.

⁴ ‘Imperial Conference 1930: appendices to the summary of proceedings’, in ‘Empire Service: conference proceedings’, E4/4, (file numbers and titles refer to files held at the BBC Written Archive, Caversham Park).

⁵ ‘Opening of the Empire Service’, John Reith, 19 December 1932, in ‘Empire Service Policy 1932-1933’, E4/6.

⁶ Or ‘the British “Dispersion”’ as this was referred to in ‘Memorandum on Empire and World Broadcasting’, June 1929. The size of this diaspora was estimated at 211 000 (not including the population of the Dominions), ‘Memorandum on Empire and world broadcasting’, 23 July 1929, in ‘Empire Service Policy 1928-1929’, E4/2. As was later noted - in regard to the drive for foreign language services, the diaspora formed ‘an exceedingly small proportion’ of the overall population of the colonies, ‘Broadcasting and the Colonial Empire’, undated - preparatory notes for, ‘Introductory

In seeking to sustain and strengthen the ties or linkages between the Empire (or at least an element of its population), the Empire Service served to reproduce the primary vector of imperial politics - with the flow of broadcasts emanating from Britain, and more specifically London, out across the Empire, interpolating the listener in a flow of material, in which as MacKenzie (1987:43, 49) adumbrates, imperial achievements and responsibilities, national ceremonies, and great rituals involving the monarchy were accorded primary significance. Whilst there was some discussion of the hope of developing the exchange of broadcasts from other parts of the Empire - these remained highly limited (Briggs 1995:355-356; MacKenzie 1987:50). In such terms the functioning of the Empire Service bears close affinities with Lacan's conception of the discourse of the master as set out in the following equation or 'matheme':

$$\frac{S1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S2}{a}$$

Here, S1, the master signifier (the presence in the domain of the Symbolic of the individual subject (\$) who assumes the position of the master) constitutes the active agent that seeks to order the field of other signifiers (or realm of knowledge) (S2) - as in the case of the Empire Service the voice of the service as heard by its listeners, sought to do⁹. The position occupied by the objet petit a ('a' in the matheme) as that which is produced by or constitutes the remainder of this discourse, designates though that this attempt at mastery of the domain of knowledge remains incomplete - that, in Dylan Evans' words, 'all attempts at totalisation are doomed to failure' (2003:45) - with the catalyst of the subject's desire standing beyond this attempt at mastery.

The perception that the Empire - or at least the British diaspora - was not sufficiently bound together, can be traced in the prominence accorded to the figure of 'the lonely listener' in the discussions leading up to the establishment of the Empire Service¹⁰, with this figure functioning as a metonym for the notion that the members

Memo on Broadcasting and the Colonial Empire', from BBC to Colonial Office, October 25 1935, in 'Empire Service Policy 1935', E4/8.

⁷ As an initial proposal for the Empire Service made clear, 'In this survey account is taken only of white population under the British flag. The exclusion of peoples of other races is justified - at least at present - by the fact that the field of appeal of European-type programmes is substantially limited to Europeans, and also by the fact that, in proportion as native populations develop an interest in broadcasting, the local service will provide the natives with programmes of their own types', 'Empire Broadcasting: memorandum A - proposal submitted by the British Broadcasting Corporation of the United Kingdom in November, 1929', in 'Empire Service: Colonial Committee on Broadcasting, Papers 6-21', E4/23.

⁸ Reith letter to The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 February 1931, E4/4 *ibid*.

⁹ The conception of 'the master' Lacan deploys is derived from Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Žižek (1998) provides the clearest account of the four discourses developed in *Seminar XVII*.

¹⁰ See for example, Memo 'Empire Broadcasting', 26 February 1929; and 'Extract from Control Board Minutes, 7 August 1929', both in 'Empire Service Policy 1928-1929', E4/2.

of this diaspora were isolated from Britain, and craved a service that would provide a link to the home or mother country - with Reith, in his speech for the opening of the Empire Service, identifying a key goal of the service as, 'dispelling some of the isolation and loneliness which is the lot of so many of our kindred overseas'¹¹.

The emphasis accorded to the lonely listener can itself though be understood as encouraged by the development of international broadcasting, with the possibility of linking up this diaspora by radio (where previously this had not been possible), emphasising that this diaspora was not as well connected as it might (now) be. Whilst letters to the BBC made clear the demand for a service that would provide an antidote to the sense of isolation experienced by certain listeners, such a claim has to be set against Stephen Constantine's (2003:19) assertion - in discussing emigration (in the period after 1880) from Britain to the Empire - that by the interwar era in many cases emigrants were hardly alone 'out there', with an extensive emigrant culture having developed in many parts of the Empire.

The sense of needing to link up this diaspora was reinforced by an awareness of the activity of other international broadcasters, with by the time of the Empire Service's launch, the Netherlands operating an international service (the first such service, active since 1927), along with the Soviet Union, and a number of commercial companies from the United States broadcasting on short wave. In a meeting at the Colonial Office in May 1927, the tendency of listeners to make comparisons with these other international broadcasters and the absence of a similar British service, was highlighted, 'We have from time to time received communications from the Colonies to the effect, "Why cannot you go ahead and give us programmes such as we sometimes hear from America?"'¹². At the same meeting the perception amongst listeners in the Colonies of US broadcasts, was also pointed to, in terms of, 'Whatever is received and however bad is taken as marvellous because it is received from such a long way, and the impression in the Empire that America is very far ahead of us is due to that they have rushed in at an imperfect thing'. Here can be identified an instance in which, as Kennan Ferguson (2003) adumbrates in his discussion of the politics of silence, silence is perceived as constituting a form of weakness, one that opens up the space for other broadcasters to establish links with members of the British diaspora and challenge the primacy of British imperial discourse (an issue that will be returned to later in discussing the BBC's foreign language services). As JH Whitley, Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors, speaking soon after the launch of the Empire Service contended, there existed the sense that, 'British Broadcasting was in danger of being left behind. Other countries were already operating powerful short wave stations receivable in most parts of the world'¹³.

¹¹ 'Opening of the Empire Service', John Reith, 18 December 1932, in 'Empire Service policy 1932-1933', E4/6.

¹² 'Colonial Office Conference - notes of the fifteenth meeting held at the Colonial Office', 20 May 1927, in 'Empire Service Policy, 1927', E4/1. US broadcasts to the Dominions for 'trade purposes' were identified as having possible economic repercussions, 'The BBC Empire Broadcasting Service - a report on certain public relations aspects', November 1937, in 'Empire Service policy 1937-1938', E4/10.

¹³ 'BBC Announcement - Mr JH Whitley on Empire Broadcasting' 17 Jan 1933, in op. cit E4/6.

The question of the relationship of the Empire Service to the discourse of the master takes us back to the issue of how to situate this service, and hence the BBC more broadly, in relation to the British state, or, in terms of the matheme of the discourse of the master, clarifying the position the movement from the master signifier to knowledge (S1→S2) instigated by the Empire Service, occupies in regard to the contemporary politics of imperialism. Whilst the formal or constitutional separation of the BBC from government suggests at one level the BBC's 'independence' from government, the intended linking function of the Empire Service makes explicit its fundamental political function. The initial reluctance of the government to provide the BBC with extra funds for the Empire Service - with the Corporation instead having to draw upon revenue from domestic licence fees - rather than denying the political function of this service, can be taken as serving to highlight that whilst the government may have yet to have realised the political importance of such a service, the hierarchy of the BBC were well aware of this.

Locating the Empire Service (and the BBC more broadly) in relation to the discourse of the master serves to position the service in close proximity to Douglas Kerr's (2002:477) assessment of the BBC fulfilling Althusser's ([1970] 1993) conception of an 'Ideological State Apparatus'. Whilst Althusser's work on ideology itself draws upon Lacan (most clearly in regard to the ties between ideology and the Imaginary), the discourse of the master adds a further dimension to the mechanisms through which such apparatus operate¹⁴. As Kerr goes on to assert, the very terms in which the BBC strove to appear not to assume an obvious or overtly political function - via the aura of 'impartiality', 'judiciousness' and 'restraint' it sought to cultivate in its output, that as MacKenzie (1987:49-50) observes extended into an almost obsessive desire to avoid anything that might be considered controversial - can be seen as serving to obscure or mask such a function¹⁵ (as Artyomov and Semyonov (1984) also assert). The sense in which these characteristics of the Empire Service's output imbued the service with an enhanced 'authority' were noted in an internal BBC memo from June 1936:

The sensationalism which figures so largely in news broadcasts from American and from some other foreign stations has been deliberately avoided, and in contrast with the propagandist news from many other European short-wave stations the news from Daventry has been presented in a strictly imperial manner, with natural observance of a British standpoint on a broad Imperial basis. During the tense situation in international affairs in the past year there has been substantial and spontaneous recognition of the authority and impersonality of the Empire Service's news¹⁶.

¹⁴ As does the discourse of the university, that will be discussed in a moment.

¹⁵ Whilst eliding the fact that there is no neutral language - no metalanguage that exists beyond the rhetorical.

¹⁶ Memo 'Foreign languages and the Empire Service', 17 June 1936, in 'Empire Service Policy, 1936', E4/9.

Yet, the ‘naturalness’ and ‘impersonality’ identified here with the Empire Service can be positioned as emanating from an ideal conception of the master - as dealineated by Žižek (1998:76) - one that need not indulge in or resort to the ‘sensationalism’ and ‘propagandist’ techniques of other broadcasters, but is sure that, ‘I am what I say’.

The acousmetric voice, the voice of God, the technological sublime

Beyond the terms in which the voice carried the content of the Empire Service’s broadcasts, the formal qualities of the radio voice served to enhance the potency of the service’s output. As Lacan (2007:131) notes in his brief comments on radio in *Seminar XVII*, in contrast to a speaker who is present, ‘The circumstances are different when it comes to speaking for some tens, even hundreds, of thousands of listeners, for whom the abrupt test of presenting oneself without support of the person can produce other effects’.

To Sartre analysis of the radio voice’s unilinearity can be added the invasive capacities of the voice. As Mladen Dolar asserts, the ‘power of the voice stems from the fact that it is so hard to keep it at bay - it hits us from the inside, it pours directly into the interior without protection. The ears have no lids ... they cannot be closed’ (2006:78). Whilst the radio listener might be able to switch off the radio, whilst listening the listener is exposed to whatever is broadcast, interpolating the listener in a relationship to this material which they can do little do respond to or alter the flow of. At the same time though, as Lacan contends, ‘All speech calls for a response ... there is no speech without a response, even if speech meets only with silence’ (2006:206) - with the act of not responding itself constituting a choice of response. In the case of radio voice though, whilst this voice may situate the listener in a relationship with the discourse of the master that appears to elicit or provoke a response, as Sartre emphasises, the listener possesses little opportunity to respond directly back to it¹⁷ - emphasising that the power in this process of exchange stands firmly on the side of the radio voice, and underlining the sense in which as Frank Biocca observed, in a commentary on early radio (1988:68), that ‘The power of the spoken word had never been so great’.

At the same time the Empire Service presents a voice that speaks on a global scale, yet without the listener being able to see who (which mouth, or body) this voice emanates from. In such terms this voice possesses close affinities with the conception of ‘the acousmetric voice’ as developed by Michel Chion in *The Voice of the Cinema* (1999): a voice in the case of which the body it emanates from remains unseen - the standard experience of radio for the listener (indeed Allen Weiss identifies radio as ‘the acousmetric medium’ (1992:301)). Chion identifies the acousmetric voice with four particular attributes: ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience and omnipotence - associations which at once achieve a type of apotheosis in international broadcasting

¹⁷ See note 3.

with its global reach and range, and that in turn serve to enhance the potency of the radio voice. Indeed, as Kerr has asserted in regard to the Overseas Service (the service the Empire Service metamorphosed into in 1939), in a comment which applies equally well to the Empire Service, 'Being disembodied and apparently context-free, but also globally knowledgeable and authoritative', this voice appears as, 'both thoroughly naturalized and uncannily oracular' (2002.:480). In such terms it is possible to read Reith's desire, in comments on radio use in Britain - for the radio to be hidden away when it is listened to in a domestic setting - as working with an awareness of these associations (Moore 1988:32)¹⁸.

If, as Weiss discusses in regard to Antonin Artaud's 1947 work for radio, 'Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu'¹⁹, the radio can be conceived as possessing certain affinities with the voice of God (1992:301) (a or the supreme acousmetre), international broadcasting, in its global reach and range is perhaps most suggestive of this connection. As Lacan asserts, 'acting the master is to think of oneself as univocal' (2007:103), a conception of the discourse of the master that points to its attempts to assume an all powerful status, in seeking to assert the primacy of its declarations (and as such giving rise to anxieties around the challenges to this univocality that will be explored in a moment). If this comparison with God strays too far into the territory of the sacred, the presence of the supreme secular figure in the Empire - that of the British monarch - is suggestive of a more earthly version of mastery. As Briggs outlines, Reith hoped that a broadcast by King George V would inaugurate the new service, and whilst this did not happen, the King's Christmas broadcast was carried six days later, with Reith noting, 'It was quite extraordinary how quickly replies came from various parts of the Empire' (1995:357) - a testament, as Sydney Head (1979:42) suggests, to 'how the powerful symbol of the monarch ... could gain an added dimension from the miraculous immediacy of broadcasting', but at the same time providing an updating of those historical incidences Dolar (2006:111) points to, whereby the people have had to 'give its voice' when a monarch assumed their position (here, where the monarch takes up his position as the voice of the master) - both as a sign of acceptance and of tribute.

Beyond this association with the godlike early radio was subject to a panoply of further associations with the supernatural, coming to be compared with, 'telepathy, seances, and angelic visitations' (Durham Peters 1999:206) in the medium's capacity to, in Biocca's words, present 'voices in the sky as if magic' (1988:77). Such conceptions of radio point towards the affinities between its early reception and David Nye's notion of the 'technological sublime' (1994), with the very newness of the radio voice and the rapidity of its development in the first decades of the twentieth century - its progress from nascent technology to, in the form of international

¹⁸ The question of Reith's desire, in the context of the role he played in the BBC's early years, in turn invokes the question of the master's desire. In this respect his daughter's recent description of him as a 'thunder god' is suggestive, 'Reith's daughter tells of his volcanic moods', Charlotte Higgins, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2149527,00.html.

¹⁹ Artaud's work was intended to be in 1948, yet was pulled the day before its broadcast for its scatological and political content.

broadcasting, functioning on a global scale - contributing to the sense of wonder associated with the medium being able to reach, as Biocca (1988:71) observes, 'a vast geographically diffuse audience, the size of which had been heretofore unimaginable', in its establishing, 'a global envelope of sound' (ibid.:73).

Contra the master, 'Stars of the Cabaret World'

Whilst the Empire Service sought to link up the British diaspora, it was not the case that this linking up was total or complete. As the presence of the 'objet petit a' in the matheme of the discourse of the master denotes, the functioning of this discourse always gives rise to a remainder beyond the attempt at mastery. At the same time, Derrida's (1987) critique of Lacan's perceived structuralism serves to highlight the terms in which the functioning of the Symbolic in this discourse (designated in the matheme S1 and S2), is less fixed than it might appear to be, emphasising the indeterminacy that pervades this discourse.

At an empirical level, the limits and gaps in the terms in which the Empire Service sought to disseminate this discourse are also apparent. Most obviously, not every member of the British diaspora listened to the service. Briggs (1995:378) notes the difficulty in calculating with any accuracy the number of listeners in the service's early years, whilst pointing to estimates from early listener research, conducted around 1938-1939 (the precise date is not clear), that suggest there were less than one hundred thousand wireless receiving sets in use in the forty seven colonies. Whilst the Dominions, which Briggs describes as providing, 'a large and highly critical audience' (ibid.:378), possessed a far higher number of registered wireless users, the BBC had to compete with (newly established) national broadcasters for their attention²⁰, and faced a situation in which, as a Corporation report contended, 'the majority' of listeners had 'never visited Great Britain and have few sentimental attachments'²¹. At the same time listeners did not of course listen all the time. In terms of how often people listened the research from 1938-1939 pointed to 21% of listeners up to 10 hours per week, with 6% listening for more than 40 hours per week (ibid.:379).

The perception that listeners from the Dominions constituted a particularly critical audience was mirrored in the antipathy apparent towards the Empire Service at a higher level. As Briggs outlines, at the Dominions Conference of November 1930, the response to the establishment of such a service was, 'Far from enthusiastic ... For all the talk of Empire unity, the Dominions always wanted to go their own way, and control of broadcasting seemed almost to be a test case of national sovereignty' (1995:349), with the conference resulting in the Dominions emphasising, 'the technical and financial difficulties of this scheme' (ibid.:350), and requesting that the British government require the BBC to engage in a consultation process with other

²⁰As Briggs (1995:378) outlines there were 927 000 licensed receivers in Australia, 226 000 in New Zealand, and just over one million in Canada. (Briggs does not mention South Africa).

²¹Op. cit., 'The BBC Empire Broadcasting Service - a report on certain public relations aspects'.

broadcasters across the Empire, in regard to their readiness to contribute to relaying those parts of the service they might require. When, at the beginning of 1931 the BBC did write to the relevant parties in the Dominions, no responses were forthcoming - a silence that was read as a sign of the lack of support for the service²². As Briggs' comment in regard to the 1930 conference suggests, such an attitude points towards the Dominions' awareness of the terms in which an Empire Service could function as a means of disseminating an imperial discourse that locates Britain at its centre - at that critical moment, between the 1926 Balfour Declaration and the 1931 Statute of Westminster, when the terms of full independence for the Dominions were being negotiated.

The presence of other broadcasters and the challenge they presented to the univocality of the Empire Service presented a further challenge to the role the service played in disseminating the discourse of the master. Not only by the time of the launch of the Empire Service were a number of other international broadcasters already active - as early as September 1932 (several months prior to the launch of the service), questions were being asked about the need to counter propaganda broadcasts (an issue that would become more central later in the decade) in the form of Soviet transmissions to Palestine and the Persian Gulf²³. This sense of competition was not only limited to the sphere of international broadcasting though, it could, as most clearly apparent in the case of the Dominions (which by the launch of the Empire Service possessed their own national broadcasters), be seen as taking the form of the challenge presented to univocality of the Empire Service by national broadcasters - generating a sense of rivalry evident in a memo from the Director of the Empire Service, a few months after the service had been launched, observing that, 'The Australians have immense conceit where their broadcast is concerned and imagine that they can teach us more than we can teach them'²⁴.

Noise and interference - a widespread issue in early radio, but especially so for a service that broadcast on short-wave over long distances - constituted a further source of disruption to the Empire Service²⁵. In one respect this interference could be understood as working to undermine the terms in which the Empire Service functioned to carry the discourse of the master, in its intrusion into and disruption of broadcasts, rendering them broken and inaudible - and as such not only demonstrating the fragility of the terms in which the service functioned as a carrier of this discourse, but, revealing the materiality of this discourse and its own fragility. Another quite different approach to this issue though is suggested by Adorno in his 1928 essay on the gramophone, 'The curves of the needle' (1999), written at around the same time as the emergence of international broadcasting. Here, Adorno attests to the paradox that, the more the technology of the gramophone makes its presence known, the more vivid

²² 'Empire Service', in 'Empire Service - historical notes', E4/51. (A timeline, undated).

²³ 'Meeting with Mr Leeper', 29 September 1932, in E4/6.

²⁴ Memo, 28 February 1933, in 'Empire Service Policy 1932-1933', E4/6.

²⁵ See for example, letter from HR Palmer, Governor of Cyprus to Malcolm Macdonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 November 1935, in E4/23; Memo 'The Empire broadcasting service transmissions 2&3', 26 November 1936. E4/9. Even now those who listen to the World Service on medium wave will be aware of the distortion and background noise there can be.

the listener's experience of the presence of the singer - an argument that accords with the notion that the impact of the Empire Service upon the listener can be judged as in part deriving from the sense of the technological sublime associated with this service: as if this interference and distortion comes to doubly inscribe the voice with a sense of the sublime²⁶.

The preference of listeners for certain programmes constituted a further challenge to the Empire Service's capacity to disseminate the discourse of the master. The audience research conducted in 1938-1939 identified variety programmes and light entertainment - both of which featured music prominently - over and above news broadcasts and talks as the most popular types of Empire Service programmes (Briggs 1995:379-380)²⁷, with *Music Hall* appearing as the favourite programme followed by *In Town Tonight* and *Monday Night at Seven*. Indeed MacKenzie (1987:43, 52) stresses the popularity of music not only to listeners of the Empire Service, but as a key element in the popularity of other international stations - including once World War II had commenced, German and Japanese stations. At first glance such preferences might serve to cast doubt on the terms in which the Empire Service functioned to disseminate the discourse of the master, with Lacan identifying this discourse led by the operation of the Symbolic (the order of language), with music standing outside of and beyond this realm. However, in another respect the broadcasting of music can be located as a lure and a screen for the politically orientated function of the Empire Service, in which, as McKenzie (1987:48) asserts, 'the prime importance of the attractiveness of other programmes lay in winning the audience for the news'²⁸, an assessment echoed in a Corporation memo from January 1940 (which can again be applied to the Empire Service) in which, 'entertainment programmes' are identified as constituting, 'mainly sustaining programmes' for news bulletins - with the latter positioned as constituting, 'the most important function of the Overseas Service'²⁹. Indeed, news bulletins - in declaring to the listener the Empire Service's version of the state of the world at that moment and as it unfolds across time, seeking, in Justin Lewis's words, 'the power ... to define the world' (2003:336) - can be seen to occupy a pivotal position in the terms of the Empire Service functioning as a carrier of the discourse of the master.

However, whilst music might not readily be located in terms of Lacan's conception of the discourse of the master, (although the presence of lyrics points to

²⁶ A comment from Admiral Carpendale alludes to the potential attraction of noise and interference to listeners, in terms of the BBC not having developed international broadcasting simply, 'to put out noises combined with all sorts of atmospherics and inaccuracies and periods of silence and unpleasantness merely to satisfy what might be called the sentimental feeling abroad just to hear from another country something which is neither music nor intelligible speech', 'Notes of the fifteenth meeting held at the Colonial Office', 20 May 1927, in 'Empire Service Policy 1927', E4/1.

²⁷ Although the popularity of news was also pointed to, see 'The BBC Empire Broadcasting Service - a report on certain public relations aspects', November 1937, in 'Empire Service Policy 1937-1938', E4/10.

²⁸ As MacKenzie outlines (1987:48-49), news on the Empire Service did not suffer from the type of restrictions it did on the domestic service - such as no news broadcasts before 6pm (a concession to newspapers and news agencies).

²⁹ 'Notes on Overseas Service', 5 January 1940, in 'Empire Service Policy, 1939-1942', E4/11.

the terms in which music might at least in part be configured in terms of the Symbolic), Kristeva's conception of 'the semiotic' in her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) points to the sense in which music might be situated as taking up a position as adjunct or supplement to the discourse of the master. As Kristeva conceives it, the semiotic constitutes the realm of those pre and extra-Symbolic modes of enunciation (from an infant's babbling, to the rhythms of poetic language) that includes music (ibid.:24, 80, 104, 63, 153). In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva stresses the terms in which the semiotic serves to constitute a putative source of disruption to the Symbolic - whilst noting that the semiotic and the Symbolic cannot be clearly demarcated, with the semiotic always present in the Symbolic to some degree. (Indeed Rudolf Arnheim, in a work from 1936 that identifies radio as serving to promote the musicalization of speech - its 'developing to a further degree our feelings for the musical elements of speech and all sounds' (ibid.:42-43) - suggests the terms in which the radio draws out the semiotic aspects of the voice). Yet, as the presence of music on the Empire Service suggests, it is possible to trace a connection between the discourse of the master and the semiotic in the form of music. In such terms the semiotic presents a means of conceptualising the process by which music broadcasts on the Empire Service can be understood as not only serving to act as a lure or a screen for the other functions of the service, but at the same time providing a further link for the listener to the mother country. In the context of the Empire Service the type of affectual tie to the nation generated by music was most clearly evident in the desire of listeners to hear the national anthem and the chimes of Big Ben (MacKenzie 1987:43). At the same time though it was not always the case that the use of music was calculated as effectively as it might be, as a complaint from June 1938, from Felix Greene, the Service's North American Representative, makes clear, '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 Cabaret World"'³⁰. (Then again, it might be contended that substituting coverage of Hitler's arrival with the latter programme presents an instance in which music was used to screen out events the BBC did not want to cover).

Natives and Loudspeakers

If in the initial version of the Empire Service the target audience was identified as the British diaspora, the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies regarded as constituting neither a 'suitable' nor 'worthwhile' audience for the new service, in terms of: their inability to understand English, the otherness of their cultures, their lack of cultural development, and their inability to afford wireless sets and to know how to operate them³¹. In addition - and in regard more specifically to the voice -

³⁰ 'Report', Felix Greene, 8 June 1938, in 'Empire Service Policy 1937-1938', E4/10.

³¹ See fn. 7, and 'Committee on Broadcasting Services in the Colonies - Gold Coast, report on the broadcasting department for 1937-1938', in 'Empire Service Policy 1935', E4/8; and 'Vernacular

doubts were cast on the ability of certain indigenous groups to cope with or make sense of the acousmetric dimensions of the radio voice. As the governor of the Tanganyika Territory, H Macmichael, contended at the 1936 East African Governor's conference, 'the effect on the native of receiving propaganda, however wholesome [for which might be read radio broadcasts in general], from the unfamiliar ether, might be merely to arouse bewilderment and confusion in his mind'³². Underpinning such assessments can be traced the sense in which the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies are regarded as presenting a rather different version of the \$ (the subject in its relationship to the Symbolic) than the members of the British diaspora - one that, in the case of Macmichael's comment, is perceived as constituting a different connection to the voice - that contributed to this group having been regarded as insufficiently significant to be subject to the discourse of the master in the form in which it was initially carried by the Empire Service.

Developments in international politics however brought a quite rapid reappraisal of this attitude, with the issue - that came to the fore in 1934 - of Italy and Germany using broadcasts to speak to the inhabitants of British colonies in the listener's own language (Briggs 1992:364-365, 369). Whilst Weiss (1992:300-301) associates with the listener the paranoia emanating from the conception of the radio as possessing affinities with the voice of God, in the case of these broadcasts from Italy and Germany it was the BBC that was most acutely aware of the challenge they might present to the stability and cohesion of the Empire - in a process that possesses parallels with that of 'hearing voices' associated with paranoia. Indeed, one response to these hostile broadcasts was the development of a 'monitoring service', instigated by the Foreign Office in 1937 to monitor the activity of these other, hostile voices (Briggs 1995:373, 604-605) - replicating the process by which the paranoid seeks to pay careful attention to their aural hallucinations in the attempt to make sense of the threat they face³³. (We are some distance here from the Ernest Barker's vision of communal international broadcasting as a means of fostering understanding between nations as set out in the *BBC Annual* for 1935). In terms of the discourse of the master, the presence of these Italian and German broadcasts can be located as introducing a new upper circuit (or circuits) to this discourse (S1 → S2) that threatens to overturn or displace that presented by the Empire Service (and that presented by British imperialism more broadly) and as such co-opt the colonial subject. In positioning these broadcasts as propaganda, the Corporation sought to assert the 'impartiality' of its own output - as Mackenzie (1987:45-46, 53) observes, whilst the

educational broadcasting for backward races - particularly as applied to Africa', LA Notcutt, 23 July 1936, in 'Empire Service Colonial Office Committee on Broadcasting Papers 22-34', E4/24.

³² 'Committee on Broadcasting Services in the Colonies - extract from proceedings of East African Governors Conference, June 1936', in 'Empire Service Colonial Office Committee on Broadcasting, Papers 22-34', E4/24.

³³ The development of this service presents perhaps the clearest association of the Empire Service with the quality of panopticism associated with the acousmestre. Kerr (2002:480) emphasises the links between the Empire Service and the monitoring service as underwriting the BBC's apparently all-seeing capacity, as if 'the ears if not the eyes of the BBC were everywhere', and as providing 'unparalleled access to the real events of the world, for which the BBC was famous' (Kerr 2002:481).

BBC worked to publicly distance itself from any notion of engaging in propaganda, internally the relationship between the Empire Service's output and its function as propaganda was extensively discussed³⁴ - a denial of its political function of the type foregrounded in Kerr's analysis.

It did not take long for the anxieties generated by these broadcasts from Germany and Italy to generate a response. As the report of the Ullswater Committee (set up in 1935 to review the renewal of the BBC's charter at the end of 1936) made clear, 'In the interests of British prestige and influence in world affairs we think that the appropriate use of languages other than English should be encouraged' (Briggs 1995:365). This time - in contrast to the lack of support displayed for the initial establishment of the Empire Service - the government was more eager to provide backing, instigating the mechanism whereby the service received funding from the Foreign Office: a shift that, as Donald Browne (1982:161) contends, positioned the BBC as answerable to the government in a way in which had previously not been, with Reith, whilst publicly insisting that the BBC must have the final say, admitting to the head of the Arabic Service (appointed by the Foreign Office), 'I do not like to think of our doing anything the Foreign Office opposed' (ibid.:179-180). And yet, just as in emphasising how the formal independence of the BBC from government should not be taken as implying that the BBC was politically neutral, so it would be wrong to inscribe a pound sign over the matheme of the discourse of the master and assert that because now the service was funded by the Foreign Office it sought to mimic the desires of this department in a predetermined fashion. This is evident in the initial news broadcast given by the first of the BBC's foreign language services to be launched - the Arabic Service, inaugurated on 3 January 1938 - which reported on the execution of a Palestinian man by order of a British military court: a incident that raised questions in regard to the way in which such a story might undermine British interests (Briggs 1995:374; Partner 1988:17-20).

Franz Fanon's ([1959] 1980) discussion of the position occupied by radio in Algeria, whilst addressing a quite different moment - that of the struggle for decolonisation - is suggestive in regard to the Empire Service in terms of the way in which radio, in its function as a carrier of the discourse of the master, served to emphasise to the colonised their status as subjects of an imperial project. Whilst the French state broadcaster Radio Algier at once constituted a bond for French settlers back to France - and another imperial variant of the discourse of the master - at the same time, as Fanon draws out, the presence of the voice of Radio Algier served to act as a reminder to the colonised of their status as imperial subjects, with the very presence of a wireless set serving to constitute a point of rupture in the culture of the colonised. (Shaun Moores (1988:26-29) in discussing early radio in Britain also draws attention to the rupture in everyday life brought about by the arrival of radio - as Fanon's piece suggests this impact was magnified in the case of radio's insertion into a colonial context).

³⁴ See for example 'Committee on Broadcasting Services in the Colonies', Paper No 18, 'Draft Interim Report', [undated] in op. cit. E4/23.

A particular issue for the dissemination of the BBC's foreign language services was how - in the context of many potential listeners lacking access to private wireless receivers - native populations would be able to listen to broadcasts. Here, already established practices of communal listening offered a solution. One form these had taken had been the relaying by loudspeaker of particularly significant Empire Service broadcasts - as in Georgetown, British New Guiana, where in 1935 the King's Silver Jubilee ceremony was, 're-broadcast by loudspeakers in the Victoria Law Courts quadrangle where the children of the city schools had been assembled for the celebrations'³⁵; or, at the opening in Freetown, Sierra Leone of a broadcast relay service in May 1934, where the governor reported on the setting up of loudspeakers for the evening for those without radio subscriptions in the Wilbeforce Memorial Hall, which was 'thronged with an enthusiastic and wondering audience', mostly indigenous, for whom, 'the playing of the National Anthem [over the radio] on my entry into the Hall, although but a simple matter of synchronization, was regarded as a miracle'³⁶. At the same time the extension of the provision of communal listening for the foreign language services was able to draw upon the systems developed by 'colonial broadcasting' (the radio networks that had developed within the colonies), that, whilst limited in scale, did provide a certain level of infrastructure for communal listening in the form of village sets and loudspeakers (Head (1979) and Zivin (1998)).

These practices of communal listening can be understood as enhancing the acousmetric dimensions of the radio voice - in presenting a voice that speaks across public space - rendering it more apparent (and less avoidable)³⁷, and enhancing the sense in which it was addressed not only to the individual listener but to a multiple public - a process that was endowed with greater formality by the assembling of local populations (as in the above examples) to listen to broadcasts. Here, Grigory Chuhkrai's 1959 Soviet film *Ballad of a Soldier*, set during the Second World War, is (in the absence of further data) suggestive in regard to the effects of such methods of dissemination. In a scene in which the flow of the film (and the film is very much about movement, following the course of a soldier's journey home from the front), is halted by a loudspeaker announcement about the progress of the war, we see the assembled figures motionless, as if transformed into statues by the voice from the loudspeaker - making visible the effects of the presence of the discourse of the master as carried via the amplified voice.

At the same time though, even where formal communal listening arrangements were not in place, the presence of the voice of the BBC's services could still make itself felt - with Briggs (1995:372) quoting from a 1938 report from Cairo, 'If one walks up the Sahria Farouq in Cairo, one need not stop at one café or barber's shop to know what is on the programme; one merely walks along and there is a continuity of radio emission as though it were one set'. Here the notion of a universal

³⁵ Governor of British New Guiana, G Northcote, letter to Colonial Office, 18 November 1935.

³⁶ Letter from Arnold Hodson, Governor of Sierra Leone to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 May 1934, in, Empire Service: Colonial Committee on Broadcasting, Papers 6-21', E4/23.

³⁷ Zivin (1998:733) in discussing colonial broadcasting in rural India outlines how in Peshawar loudspeakers were locked to a high volume so as to ensure they were heard.

set, continually present - perhaps the ultimate phantasy of proponents of the political value of foreign language services - had assumed a kind of reality.

‘An instrument of advanced administration’: the discourse of the university

The sense in which broadcasts to native populations might play a somewhat different role to that of the discourse of the master was also opened up by the introduction of foreign language services. As E Bowyer of the Colonial Office, observed in January 1936, ‘I envisage the development of Colonial Broadcasting - and its justification - not as an instrument of entertainment for Europeans and quasi-Europeans ... but as an instrument of advanced administration ... for the enlightenment and education of the native populations and their instruction in public health, agriculture etc.’³⁸ - objectives which the foreign language services were identified as building upon, and echoed in regard to British Guiana, in terms of the potential of broadcasting for, ‘dissemination of information regarding health, social habits, thrift, ethics, domestic science, the ideals of domestic and or national life’³⁹. At the same time the potential to provide a means of education more broadly, and the possibility, as suggested in regard to the Tanganyika territory, of, ‘spreading thought amongst primitive rural African peoples’, in the face of widespread illiteracy was also proposed⁴⁰.

Such a role serves to emphasise the terms in which the Empire Service could also be used to disseminate a second of the four discourses Lacan outlines in *Seminar XVII*, that of the university (or more broadly ‘science’) - that he plots with the following matheme:

$$\begin{array}{l} \underline{S2} \rightarrow \underline{a} \\ S1 \quad \quad \$ \end{array}$$

Here ‘S2’ (knowledge), assumes the position of the active agent which is imparted to the objet petit a - and seeks to structure the subject’s desire, with the subject (\$) assuming the position of that which is intended to be produced by this discourse - the subject who acts in accordance with this knowledge. And yet, the status of knowledge serves to mask the presence of the master signifier (S1) and the attempt at mastery that always stands behind claims to knowledge. The presence of S1, the master signifier, invokes the links between this discourse and that of the master - with the latter constituting the ur-discourse from which the three other discourses in *Seminar XVII* are derived, with the discourse of the university being arrived at through shifting

³⁸ Memo ‘Colonial Broadcasting’ from EB Bowyer, 27 January 1936, in ‘Empire Service: Colonial Committee on Broadcasting, Papers 6-21’, E4/23.

³⁹ ‘Comments on broadcasting in British New Guiana in relation to the Secretary of State’s circular despatch dated 8th May 1935’, Chief Engineer of the Post Office Department, British Guiana, in E4/23.

⁴⁰ Memo ‘Broadcasting to primitive peoples with an educational purpose’, 10 February, 1938, in ‘Empire Service Colonial Committee on Broadcasting: Sub-committee papers 41-50’, E4/30.

the discourse of master a quarter turn anti-clockwise (each of the successive discourses outlined in the seminar are arrived at through a quarter turn anticlockwise from the former). Indeed, whilst 'neutral' knowledge, or science, now assumes the role of active agent - purportedly determining how decisions are taken - as Žižek (1998:78) emphasises, this discourse continues to be underpinned by questions of power and the presence of the master⁴¹ (with the power of the State and its legitimate monopoly on violence - as delineated by Weber ([1919] 2004:33) - still present at the kernel of this discourse). The emergence of this discourse in place of that of the master implies a quite different conception of the terms in which the indigenous colonial populations should be administered - one though that was cut short by the arrival of World War II.

As with the discourse of the master the dissemination of the discourse of the university was itself regarded as facing a number of obstacles - with doubts expressed about the ability of colonial populations to be able to make effective use of radio technology (precisely the type of obstacle to modernity the discourse of the university was intended to address), along with, as a report on colonial broadcasting contended, the appeal of educative and instructional material to 'the large mass of African natives', in regard to which:

We understand there is very little known about the likely reaction of these people to broadcasting; as to whether and what extent it would appeal to them after its initial novelty had gone; as to what extent in particular they could be persuaded to listen to educational and instructional broadcasts; as to what extent such instruction would have to be combined with entertainment broadcasting; and as to what form of lighter broadcasts would be most likely to appeal⁴².

Again, evident here - as in the case of the Empire Service - is the sense in which 'entertainment' and 'lighter' broadcasts might be used as a screen or a lure for a more political function. The effectiveness of such tactics though - and indeed of the attempt to disseminate the discourse of the university - is difficult to gauge. A 1938 report on the impact of such broadcasts in Palestine contended that, 'It cannot be said that the life of the villagers has as yet been materially altered provision of these communal sets or that they take every advantage of the facilities provided'⁴³, with further evidence of the impact made eclipsed, as Head (1979:40) suggests, by the onset of the Second World War, and its bringing about a situation in which, "enlightenment and

⁴¹ As Lacan suggests (2007:148), the discourse of the university has come to replace that of the master as the dominant discourse in late modernity, in which forms of 'hard' or traditional authority have come to be eclipsed by assertions or claims to superior knowledge.

⁴² 'Committee on Broadcasting Services in the Colonies', Paper No 18, 'Draft Interim Report', [undated] in op. cit. E4/23.

⁴³ Letter from AG Waughope, High Commissioner for Palestine to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 January 1938, in 'Empire Service Colonial Office Committee on Broadcasting Papers 35-41', E4/25.

education” took second place’ to reasserting the stability of the discourse of the master via, ‘persuasion and propaganda’.

Ventriloquism, splitting

What further light can be shed on the use of foreign language broadcasts in regard to the political function of the Empire Service? The model of ventriloquism serves to provide another approach to this issue. As Durham Peters (1999:216) suggests, the practice of ventriloquism can be situated as applicable to radio in the broadest sense, ‘The ventriloquistic technique of keeping up both sides of the conversation persists in broadcast discourse’, in which as Sartre outlines, communication is unilinear and yet requires no response to proceed. As Durham Peters goes on to discuss in regard to the popularity in the United States of Edgar Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy (whose radio show ran from 1937-1956) and in the UK Peter Brough and Archie Andrews’ whose popularity reached its peak in the 1950s: ‘Two voices in dialogue, both produced by the same body. Two characters, one of them a dummy. It would be hard to find a more perfect symbol of radio’s communication circuit’.

Beyond its associations with the medium in general, the model of the speaking voice ventriloquism presents finds a specific resonance in the case of the BBC’s foreign language services - with George Orwell’s work, from 1941-1943, for the Indian Section of the Eastern Service, providing an exemplar of the applicability of this model. As Kerr discusses, Orwell scripted weekly news programmes for the service, most of which were read out on air in English but with an ‘Indian voice’ by a fellow BBC employee, Zulfaqar Ali Bokhari - with the intention of rendering these broadcasts more ‘palatable’ to their audience⁴⁴. Such a practice was not confined to this case - as Partner (1988: 29-30, 62, 126-127) makes clear in regard to the Arabic Service, the practice of British personnel scripting broadcasts to be read out by native speakers was widespread, with, in the case of news material, this practice continuing into the 1970s.

Gayatri Spivak’s question - that has become so pivotal to postcolonial studies: ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (1988), here takes on a particular inflection. Yes, in to take the example of the Orwell-Ali Bokhari relationship, the subaltern might appear to listeners of the Eastern Service to be the one who speaks to them in a voice that registers as ‘one of their own’, and yet of course all that this voice speaks is what has been written for it by the ventriloquist or puppet master. The discourse of the master (filtered through the rather unlikely medium of Orwell) has already determined what the subaltern can say.

⁴⁴ At the same time Orwell’s broadcasts were translated into a number of different Asian languages. As Kerr emphasises Orwell, despite his distaste for imperialism found himself complying with the directives of the BBC and the Ministry of Information for the type of material they wanted - a compromise based on his desire to see fascism defeated.

At the same time though ventriloquism can be seen to entail a splitting of the type outlined by Freud ([1940] 1991), whereby the ego divides as a defence against situations the it appears unable to resolve. In terms of the BBC's foreign language services, the splitting that occurs in the act of ventriloquism can be seen to constitute an attempt to avert another type of splitting or fragmentation - that of the British Empire - which the Empire Service and these foreign language services were charged with holding together. And yet, as the plethora of horror films that have featured ventriloquism and the uncontrollable status of the ventriloquist's dummy suggest (Connor 2000:409-414), ventriloquism is a practice riddled with anxieties, that centre on the identity of the ventriloquist and their ability to control that aspect of their self that finds an outlet in the ventriloquist's puppet. As such, in the practice of ventriloquism - and the recognition it contains of the need for the voice to appear as if it is the colonised's (rather than attempting, as the initial version of the Empire Service did, to exclude the colonised even as listener) - is evident the awareness of the significance of the colonised's voice. It is this voice that would come centre stage in the era of decolonisation that was to follow the Second World War - sounding a break with the discourse of the master in its imperial form.

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