

## **Popular geopolitical assemblages: BBC Radio and foreign news**

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# Abstract

This thesis aims to explore strands of assemblage, actor network theory and object oriented philosophy to the study of popular culture and world politics. Specifically it focuses on the linkages to be made between radio broadcasting, travel writing and journalism, in light of these theories. It does this through the presentation of series of archival encounters with material relating to BBC radio and foreign news production during the 1960's Cold War period, an era in which radio broadcasting and radio technologies were absolutely central to the understanding wider geopolitical environments.

The opening chapters of the thesis argue for the utility of a version of relational materialist approaches hybridised with discursive analytic frameworks as interlinked ways of thinking, which are more appropriate to understanding radio as a semiotic-discursive hybrid of popular cultural construction, as read through BBC radio and foreign news during the Cold War.

The empirical chapters look to a variety of archival texts produced by radio, including infrastructural and network plans, scripted news series and individual biographical archives and turns the tools from the hybrid framework to address them. The thesis then moves towards a further provocation: to imagine radio itself differently, as a geo-political force, and suggests further possibilities for research through engagement with conceptual art, experimental literature and sound recording to conceive of some of the non-representational aspects radio's multiple fields of relations.

The thesis concludes with a call, based on what has gone before, to recognise the importance of networked and assemblage ontologies to understanding further historical and contemporary formations of geopolitical media, and suggests further research based on the strategies it identifies.

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*“Then it arrives, rupturing the air as it breaks across the podium: it’s a burst of static – a static that contains all messages ever sent, and all words ever spoken; it combines all times and places too, scrunching these together as it swallows them into its crackling, booming mass, a mass expanding with the strength and speed of an explosion of galactic proportions, a solar flare. The static rushes over the whole crowd, and roars through Serge’s body, making his limbs and chest contract and shiver with convulsions. Sweat, or seed, or sediment, spills from him. Everything is spilling: as the chamber’s walls are blown away, rows of box files spring open on ministry shelves, vomiting their contents; archives gush up from the ground like oil; glass cabinets shatter and erupt; bathtubs slosh and overflow; even graves are opening, the dead being catapulted back out of the earth...” – Tom McCarthy, C*





## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction and Research Themes: Assemblage, Radio and the Cold War

On 4<sup>th</sup> October 1957 a small, polished metal sphere fixed to four external broadcast antenna was attached to a rocket derived from an R7 Semyorka intercontinental ballistic missile and launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in the desert steppe of Kazakhstan. As the earth's first artificial satellite settled into low Earth orbit, *Sputnik* transmitted a steady radio signal impulse. The frequencies it used were audible not only to mission control in the Soviet Union but also to by other states, organisations and amateurs using existing radio transmission and reception equipment across the world. This audibility was built into the satellite itself, designed as it was to maintain this optimal broadcast intensity even taking into account the spinning of the object in its orbit (Siddiqui 2000, 58). The first listening post outside of the Soviet Union to "hear" the Sputnik signal was a BBC Monitoring station in Tatsfield, South East England. The steady, rhythmic pulse of the satellite's signal altered the ontological understanding of communication: for the first time a signal was broadcast *to* the earth from *outside* it. Almost immediately after the "news" of Sputnik's success was received by monitoring stations, the radio pulse was *translated* into a popular, socio-cultural register, as broadcast news outlets across the world delivered bulletins and reports (themselves signals) on the successful launch and orbit.

In the half-century between the first transatlantic radio transmissions - which had caused similar ructions in the understanding of communication and action at a distance - and the launch of Sputnik, radio technologies had re-shaped the fields of communication, trade, warfare and entertainment. Radio had risen from an experimental technology regarded as having little widespread commercial potential to the pre-eminent mode of broadcast communication. In historical-cultural terms, the period between 1920 and 1950 is often referred to as the "Golden age of radio", and it is frequently argued that the rise of television from the 1940's marked the relative decline in radio as a mode of mass communication. However, what *Sputnik's* unprecedented, lonely broadcasts from the upper atmosphere demonstrates is that in military, technological and broadcast terms, radio

technologies and signals remained pervasive and pre-eminent as a technological and symbolic tools of statecraft integral to the Cold War period, well into the mid twentieth century.

The signal, consisting of a simple repetitive pulse existed within two orders simultaneously. It was a material artefact of transmission; broadcasted, coded and decoded through an enormous techno-scientific assemblage of objects, humans, bureaucracies and matter. At the same time, it was being translated into a representational, semiotic idiom which produced a variety of political and affective responses - from awe, pride and transcendental communitarianism to anxiety and fear; decisions to expand military budgets or change defence postures or patterns of regional influence. The variable ways in which the material of radio signals are transmitted and received, the networks and object systems through which these signals were conducted and propagated, and the human subjects re-broadcasting, receiving and translating them collectively demonstrate radio's substantial importance to the geopolitics and culture of the Cold War.

The power of the radio signal in the late 1950's and 1960's was not limited to the East-West theatre of superpower competition. Radio also played a role in the emergence of North-South inter-state dynamics during the wave of decolonisation between the end of the Second World War and the late 1960's. In this context too, radio technologies were to be found both at the forefront of nascent movements of national self-determination and independence-in the sense of *what* but also *how* they were able to broadcast (Fanon 1957) and conversely were also central to how Northern post-imperial states, particularly Great Britain, sought to retain influence in their former colonies. It will be the project of this thesis, then, to illustrate some of the ways in which the popular geopolitics of Cold War radio assemblages in the Cold War can be read through the archive by analysing both its material and symbolic complexities.

Radio broadcasting was a constant presence in almost every sphere of Cold War politics, from the rhetorical signalling of information broadcasts by world leaders to the growth of a truly global news environment; transmission monitoring and early warning system radar "nets" constructed by the US and The USSR, to clandestine signals intelligence broadcasts and the cultural diplomacy of various "free" radio

stations in Europe, to the anti-colonial revolutionary broadcasting in the non-aligned world. The activities of the British Broadcasting Corporation during this period (BBC) was typical of the way in which non-military aspects of radio transmission emerged as vitally important to the politics of the Cold War, representing a significant tool of power projection in the rapidly de-colonising territories of the former British Empire which could outlast the imperial retreat. It is for this reason that the substantial empirical focus of this thesis will draw on the way in which the various discursive and material forces can be seen in the British context. Broadcast radio is, then, a central technology to the military, political and cultural architectures of Cold War politics; both through the technical dynamics of superpower competition directly and also diffused through various theatres and conflicts contemporaneous with this period in the post-colonial and non-aligned world. Historical geographical research has alluded to some of these themes in previous investigations into the Cold War period, for example in relation to the links between the practice of scientific establishments in developing and the globalization of American strategic doctrine (Farish, 2010) or the architectures of cultural diplomacy and the role of the BBC World Service (Pinkerton 2008). It is my contention, though, that more can and should be said about the various ecologies; journalistic, military, diplomatic and scientific within which radio waves circulated during the Cold War period. Secondly, I believe that a series of archival materials from the BBC and National Archives - along with materials drawn from other local repositories - can demonstrate the ways in which these circulations occurred. Thirdly, given these two drivers of research, a hybrid theoretical framework drawn from some strands of new materialism can provide an original mode of analysis through which to read these materials.

This thesis will argue for a reading of radio during this period as a force-full medium, a hybrid assemblage composing human and non-human, textual and material components. Such a view is vital for how our understanding of- some of the key geopolitical narratives, power projection, military balance, communication structures and textual representations between the end of the Second World War up until the early 1970's, the period most closely associated with the height of the Cold War. As such, this time period is chosen as the historical context for the study of radio given its importance in shaping the some of the central political, geographical and cultural formations which characterised Cold War geopolitics. These include but not limited

to; the interception and decoding of signals in the service of espionage or early warning systems; the broadcasting and reception of propaganda or other forms of “soft power”, cultural diplomacy and information warfare; the growth of radio as a truly global mass medium and the role of state broadcasters with international reach and recognition for the influencing of contested or non-aligned spaces and people and the relationship between radio technologies and nuclear politics. These factors illustrate how radio technologies and the spaces they produced retained their importance during the Cold War, often specifically in relation to requirements placed upon them to perform diverse roles within this context of geopolitical confrontation; roles that were simultaneously technical, instrumental, symbolic and representational.

### **1.1 Disciplinary setting: Popular Geopolitics**

Radio broadcasting during the Cold War period should be seen within two intertwined registers of *power*: as both a symbolic-discursive agency produced within the dynamics of a given geopolitical milieu, and also, nested within this, a material force manifested in physical infrastructures where the networks of transmission and reception were coded, decoded, broadcasted and received. Furthermore, these physical manifestations of the network were not the only materials involved in the radio ecology of this period: the effects of radio technologies on human subjectivities cannot be underestimated acting as they did to shape ideas of distance, the content and context of media representations and the professional and private lives of individuals, as did the discursive constructions produced in the texts of radio broadcasts themselves.

With this in mind I argue that the sub-discipline of popular geopolitics, within which the geopolitical study of broadcasting has thus far been located, has largely seen radio as *either* a technological medium (relevant only to the extent that it informs a broader reading of how media or technical advances are related to the geopolitical), *or* within an often wider textual reading of how media representations act to discursively construct the geopolitical through the scripting of conflicts, distant spaces and Others (Pinkerton & Dodds 2007; Dittmer 2010). Consequently, on a more theoretical track, it will also be my intention to argue that rather than reducing

radio to one or the other of these accounts, to argue for a more productive strategy which reads a selected historical period in radio network broadcasting as discursive and material simultaneously. This will be done through the formulation of a hybrid theoretical framework bringing existing discursive analytic positions into dialogue with more encompassing theories around the importance of material objects and forces and it is this framework which marks the theoretical contribution of this project to the study of popular geopolitics.

It is this framework, then, that is an experiment in developing a new approach to the study of popular culture and world politics, with radio forming the empirical basis for which existing theoretical positions largely grounded in discourse analysis can be supplemented within insights from “new” materialist theories, including assemblage theory, Actor-network theory (ANT), and Object Oriented Ontology (OOO). More specifically, it is an experiment in writing through and about archives of geopolitical media through connecting these novel theoretical lenses within a theoretical hybrid that embraces the material and the discursive of the radio assemblage simultaneously. Located within political and cultural geography’s tradition of cross-disciplinary influences, it looks contribute both empirically and theoretically to studies in the sub-field of popular geopolitics, identified as “The everyday geopolitical discourse that citizens are immersed in every day” (Dittmer 2010, 14). These moves will then be used to make a case for a more systematic mobilisation of these theories alongside, rather than instead of, existing discursive analytic theories to address the ways in which the material and the discursive can be seen in different parts of the radio assemblage. A central aspect and strength of these theories is that they have been able to demonstrate to us how we might discern the dynamics of power relations through attention to everyday practices and objects, conceived as textual artefacts, and the thesis seeks to retain this ethos whilst arguing for the placing of equal emphasis on the material vectors by which these texts are transmitted.

The adoption of critical discourse analyses in critical geopolitics since the linguistic and cultural turn taken by the humanities and social sciences in the late 1980’s is well established and has led to a series of prominent studies demonstrated the sedimentation of national constructions of self and other at the level of the everyday, through attention to popular cultures, genres, tropes and linguistic utterances

(Dittmer 2012; Sharp 2000; Carter & Dodds 2015). international relations and geopolitics have only very recently though, begun to embrace the new materialist ontologies as capable of enlivening studies in these disciplines at a variety of scales and, consequently, how such an embrace requires a “change in our androcentric thinking to get at the emergent, complex set of circuits that produces our messy world” (Salter, 2015: vii). It is the case of this thesis these kinds of approaches are also appropriate to dealing with the particular sub-field of popular geopolitics although, as I shall demonstrate, such moves require a degree of negotiation with existing theoretical paradigms so as to recognise and maintain the importance of discursive analysis to the reading of radio as a geopolitical medium. As such, I am aligned here with an approach which “accepts the contingent nature of political formations but does not reduce all social or political action to discourse”(Ibid), alongside a view that as radio remained the pre-eminent medium in both the media and military spheres during in the 1960’s Cold War environment, it is an ideal object system to use to demonstrate both the tensions and the utility of these mixed approaches to popular geopolitics.

Where discursive studies addressed geopolitical media such as radio, film, television and newspapers through the theoretical lens of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Sharp 2000; Dittmer 2012) the theoretical hybrid I propose will open up an alternative strategy for how radio (and consequently other material modes of geopolitical media transmission) might be written; the extent to which human actors within radio assemblages can or cannot meaningfully be separated from the technologies with which they interface and also whether the role of language in the construction of media texts can be made compatible with these neo-materialist ontologies. As such, one of the thesis’ original contributions will be to articulate the hybrid theoretical framework and then to demonstrate its effectiveness and utility when directed towards the written archive of radio, particularly but not exclusively, in relation to how some of the absent materialities implied within this archive can be enlivened, in order to demonstrate that power, agency and effects in the world are not found solely through the critical discourse analyses of popular geopolitics alone, but can also be made visible through attention to their prominent material dimensions. The significance of this theoretical framework, and how it will be mapped on to the empirical material on which the thesis draws will be outlined in the next two sections

of this introduction through some of the speculative tendencies of assemblage and other theories. The chapter then concludes with an outline of the thesis by chapter.

## **1.2 Bringing in Materiality: New Materialism, Actor Networks and Object oriented philosophies**

As I have outlined above, much research in popular geopolitics is based on the kind of discourse analytic theoretical paradigm is specifically influenced by studies in post-colonial literature and travel writing which have sought to bring into focus the imperial epistemologies which underlie the constructions of identity in popular geopolitical texts. The thesis will seek to do justice to this paradigm whilst simultaneously looking to the broader ontological frameworks of new materialist philosophies in social research in order to assess the degree to which we might bring these novel theoretical positions to bear on the sub-field of popular geopolitics. Given the preponderance of textual analysis in the area this far as I have outlined above, it will be necessary to illustrate precisely what and how these theoretical positions can contribute to or are compatible with existing practices of textual criticism, within a hybrid approach. In the remainder of this chapter, I attend to these issues below in order to demonstrate both the utility and originality of a hybridised approach to researching about popular geopolitical media object systems such as radio. Crucially, the benefit of incorporating new materialist ontologies enables us to see that, when addressing phenomena such as “the media” in general or in this case “radio” in particular, we can begin to see the complex constellations of physical *and* discursive “things” working to create and sustain various iterations of these phenomena. This is to say that such approaches enable us to see “media” not simply as carriers of hegemonic signs and symbols but also as

There are points of compatibility but also points of friction between the three related yet distinct relational materialist philosophies with which I am concerned here; OOO; ANT and social assemblage theories in order to mobilise a hybrid approach which can be placed alongside existing readings of popular geopolitics which remain predominantly discursive in order to account satisfactorily for some of the overlooked

material dimensions of popular geopolitics. The mobilisation of these relational understandings of text, technology and media will subsequently be turned towards reading the radio assemblage as a technological actor-network implicated in a vast set of relations, *some* of which are human, discursive and textual and others which are not. This is in order to engage in the expansive ontology of networked assemblage, in which the existence of individual agencies is not as significant as:

“...their network of alliances within a shifting heterogenous and expansive relations field. Actors can bond together in a block comprising millions of individuals, they can enter alliances with iron, with grains of sand, neurons, words, opinions, and affects,’ (Barry 2013, 414)

Such recognition enables an understanding of radio as *both* a set of components, relations and processes but *also* as a space where these things *do their work*. This takes further the idea advanced by adopters of ANT and related ontologies in international relations that materials do not simply “lie around” waiting for some human labour (physical or discursive) to enrol them in systems of meaning (although of course this *does* happen), and furthermore even when this happens, the liveliness, unpredictability and emergent properties of these materials often escape these semantic “containers”. What this means in practice is that the an empirical analysis of radio in popular geopolitics should fall equally on the space of produced and performed broadcast foreign news text as it is the short-wave signal which carries it; the distant/proximate relay station which receives/transmits it, the journalist who lives within and writes of the events it portrays, the audiences who listen, the circuits in the radio set, the meetings of politicians and executives who set the terms and capacities of radio broadcasting, territoriality and governance at any given instant. Crucially, too, for the purposes of this thesis, the relationship popular geopolitics has with its own inter-texts, understood through imaginative geographies will be seen to be central to the alliances built by these texts in the semiotic-material assemblage of radio-journalism; texts have effects in the world above and beyond their written existence on a page or on the airwaves in a broadcast.

Having established some of the lines of compatibility between DeLanda’s assemblages, Latour’s ANT, the third linked theoretical position the thesis engages is Object Oriented Ontology, as illustrated by one of its clearest proponents, Graham Harman. Harman himself identifies this project as an attempt to marry ANT with a

particular reading of Heideggerian metaphysics, arguing that OOO is a “deeply *non-relational* conception of the reality of things.” Consequently, OOO finds itself opposed (on this level) to the relational approaches of ANT/Assemblage which, if they are all united on one concept, is that relations are *all there are*, or at the very least *most* of what there is. Harman’s OOO is suspicious of this, regarding a perceived dominance of relational ontologies as philosophically uninteresting and as having “held the moral high ground in philosophy for too long...The political reflexes associated with terms such as essence (‘bad’) and reciprocal interplay (‘good’) must be recalibrated”(Harman, 2007: 22, qtd in Bennett, 2012: 226). OOO is brought into this hybridised theory for the insights it is able to give regarding the *withdrawal* of certain capacities or presences of objects and object systems within assemblages. This will become particularly relevant when the thesis turns to discussions of the material infrastructures of radio and nuclear politics. It is as well to remember here that OOO, perhaps more so than ANT or DeLanda assemblages, is a highly divergent and heterodox set of philosophical positions and, as such, the thesis does not seek to systematise or adopt its wider variants programmatically but rather draws productive points of engagement, where the materialities these strands of thought enliven can be directed towards the sub-discipline of popular geopolitics, through the empirical objects of radio found in the archive.

The thesis chooses to align itself with these three modes of thinking ontology differently in relation to radio because radio is both a technological system composed of multiple actants, as per the ontological schema of ANT, but which are not always fully present to the individuals implicated within it; a polyvocal system of *voices* in regularly shifting constellations as outlined by, for example, Deleuze and Guattari (1989) *and* a cultural-political assemblage in which these technical apparatus and messages are called forth to project, secure or effect various desired goals.

Radio is, then, both a *medium* (in the sense of being a carrier, or signal) and also a *media technology* (in the sense of being a distributed object system composing multiple material, textual and individual components). It is, then, the intention of this thesis to employ this more distributed view of matter, text and agency to radio during a time when these dynamics, as I illustrated in the opening section, are perhaps most visible in a geopolitical light: the 1950’s and 1960’s, so replete were they with

the materiality and socio-cultural power of radio waves, both technologically and geopolitically.

It might seem, initially, that media are greatly distanced from these metaphysical concerns I have been outlining above, but this is not the case. Although a comparatively recent development, moves towards a more ontological reading of media theory have been undertaken of late, with the media theorist Friedrich Kittler remarking that

“Being, whether natural or technical, has been thought of for 2500 years (to agree with Heidegger) in the metaphysical terms of here-ness and presence, *entelecheia* and *ousia*, not in their many opposites such as past and future, storage and transmission...Philosophy, although it dealt from time to time with physical media or elements such as ether, light, and water, completely neglected its own technical media from the ancient volumes up to the modern bestsellers.”(Kittler 2009: 25-6)

Where I depart from OOO accounts is in their insistence on the total separateness of objects from their relations and withdrawal into a private vacuum (Harman, 2006). I think that we can maintain a position which argues for certain properties or capacities of objects (be these “mid-size” material objects such as radios, linguistic constructions such as texts or complex admixtures of subjectivities, biologies, identities and references such as individual humans) coming into contact and *relating* to each other in a caricatured manner, contacting only those properties directly relevant to their interaction whilst others withdraw. The purpose of the kind of “media archaeology”, to borrow a term from the media theorist Jussi Parikka, as I seek to use it here, is to draw attention to the way in which technical infrastructures of media both exist as material systems and interact with text-objects and discourses within which they nest and are themselves nested. Radio, read this way, creates new spaces *in spaces*, opens up multiple space-times using broadcast talk (Crissell, 1994); produces or conducts multiple gradations of affect (attention, distraction, irritation, anger, fear) through “good” or “bad” frequencies or uses of language (scripting, tone, extraneous noise), and finally, sets up new networked spaces of relay and transmission infrastructure which must be linked by material, discursive, ideological and practical circulation; that all of these practices are at the heart of this project – real and imaginative, material and semiotic – and exist simultaneously, connected and disconnected from each other at different times, the moving parts of radio assemblages.

Although various strands of the “new materialism” have emerged and its relevance explored in the field of international relations and critical geopolitics, the landscape remains one of “a paradigm for which no overall orthodoxy exists” (Coole & Frost, 2010: xvi) and, consequently, it is another aim of the thesis to bring these strands to bear on the sub-field of popular geopolitics which, as I discussed at the start of this chapter, up until very recently been defined almost entirely by a series of approaches related to text, representation and identity (see Dittmer 2010). This is understandable, given the importance of these components in the construction of popular culture(s) and the critical traditions of taking popular cultural texts seriously from which they are drawn. However, as I intend to argue over the course of this thesis, this is precisely why, through analysis of the material-textual assemblage of radio, the sub-field of popular geopolitics can, too, benefit greatly from the nascent application of a more materialist approach, and a recognition of the ways in which material objects and forces facilitate these representations and circulate within cultural formations at various scales.

Before giving an outline of the progression of the thesis by chapter, I want to set out and role of the kind of materialist ontology I have proposed thus far *vis a vis* the existing paradigm of textual criticism within popular geopolitics, both for reasons of clarity, but also to point to one of the major theoretical contributions of the thesis as a whole, which is to extract and hybridise the most relevant components from these divergent ontologies before directing this approach to the lively material of radio broadcasting during the Cold War period under discussion.

### **1.3 Materialist ontologies, textual criticism and power.**

Given the importance of text and discourse to existing analyses of popular geopolitics, the theoretical hybrid I propose for to develop and map on to the radio assemblage, it should be made clear how these theoretical traditions have engaged with ideas of text thus far. Given OOO’s suspicion of relational theories, there would seem to be an opposition between this and ANT and assemblage (which are

fundamentally relational theories). For Jane Bennett, though, this need not be a case of actual opposition. Opposing entities to relations does indeed seem to detract from some of the genuine insights of OOO, and speculative realism. As Bennett argues

“Since everyday, earthly experience routinely identifies some effects as coming from individual objects and some from larger systems (or, better put from individuations within material configurations and from the complex assemblages in which they participate), why not aim for a theory that toggles between both kinds of magnitudes of “unit”?” (Bennett 2012: 227)

this exchange in three interrelated papers in *New Literary History* from 2012 between Bennett and the Object Oriented philosophers Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton on the role of new materialism in literary criticism is perhaps the closest OOO has come to integrating these positions with a re-appraisal of the role of text, or rather, a “casting” of text within its *dramatis personae*. The reason for my focus on it here is that I believe the best way to import these kind of post-deconstructive, new-materialist theories is to work with areas where there exists common ground, rather than, as is so often the case with novel theoretical positions, to reject those already existing positions outright. Not only this, but also that the empirical chapters of this thesis will develop a reading of text which seeks to mobilise precisely the nuanced positions discussed here in the service of the archival traces of radio which are simultaneously texts to be analysed but also “things” which stand in for absent, but equally real materialities.

In these exchanges, Bennett suggests looking towards a possible textual-OOO hybrid theory whereby “The whole can be imagined as a fractious and self-diversifying process of territorializations and deterritorializations (Deleuze and Guattari) or as creative process (Bergson, Whitehead) or as some combination thereof (the various new materialisms)” (2012, 227). Morton critiques this kind of relational-assemblage account on the grounds that relational systems are reductionist, suggesting that they imply that “Some things are more real than others: flowing liquids become templates for everything else” (Morton 2013: 208). Bennett suggests that this line of critique is important, given that “ontologies of becoming...are biased toward the peculiar rhythms and scale of the human body” (Bennett, *Ibid*), although she does not accept that this compromises these accounts. The difference here seems to be at the level of metaphor though, and does not necessarily seem to be a problem for the particular study of popular culture I am

concerned with. We can, for example, see how a radio assemblage might work in the opposite way, impressing upon the human components a kind of template, or series of metaphors regarding (for example) *static*, *attunement*, *coverage* and *fidelity* emerging from the non-human objects within a given relational set. Non-human components within the assemblage working to facilitate or frustrate human machinations or attempts to impose dominance on the world can also be seen in this light. To address this, Bennett proposes a tentative ontology of textuality within her own bodies/assemblage assemblage/bodies vitalism, which,

“(W)ould also proclaim that the effectivity of a text-body, including its ability to gesture toward a something more than itself, is a function of a *distributive network* of bodies: words on the page, words in the reader’s imagination, sounds of words, sounds and smells in the reading room...texts are bodies that can light up, by rendering human perception more acute, those bodies whose favoured vehicle of affectivity is less wordy: plants, animals, blades of grass, household objects, trash...poetry can help us feel more of the liveliness hidden in such things and reveal more of the threads of connection binding our fate to theirs.”(Bennett Ibid, 232)<sup>1</sup>

One of the problems of Harman’s (and OOO in general) approach to the “text-object” is his rejection that it’s historicity or more specifically it’s antecedents, in any way play a decisive role in its current constitution. Whilst the material transmission of a radio broadcast can be regarded as standing in this kind of atomism, the idea that the textual, or semantic components which *associate* to make up the text stand apart from their historical relations (in previous texts) does not stand up. OOO is more convincing in its adoption of the Heideggerian tool analysis, which will inform the sections of this thesis concerned with the ways in which the material infrastructure(s) of radio broadcasting “withdraw” from the assemblage at certain times, only to “re-present” themselves at others.

This kind of reading in regards to the material of the text, though, is supported by another figure in OOO, Levi Bryant, who suggests that that any object oriented critique of literature and text should be centred around the notion that “Books aren’t simply *about* something, but also *are* something [and] as a consequence, it becomes necessary to explore how, as material entities, texts circulate throughout the world, producing all sorts of effects as they enter into exo-relations with various groups,

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<sup>1</sup> To this we may also add existing texts and memories of texts (which may be accurate or not) in the readers imagination.

<sup>2</sup> To be clear, this is not a question of editorial “line” or “balance”, rather the network of sonic and visual codes, settings and delivery which mark the corporate “style” of a given

collectives, institutions, and people” (Bryant 2010). This is important here, because it is just as true for broadcasts, which are material-textual entities, as it is for purely written texts. In addition to this, OOO’s central concern with the “withdrawal” of objects from actual manifestations of their virtual or potential being and capacities maps on to existing literary critiques of the idea of the *trace* of previous texts *haunting* the reading of a given text (Derrida, 1993). The virtual as the potential-as-yet-unreleased is not a direct corollary to the haunted text though, and instead should, for Bryant, be regarded thusly

“Insofar as the virtual proper being of a text is necessarily withdrawn, this dimension of texts could only ever be sensed in *traces* indicating or suggesting another dimension at work in the manifest dimension of a text. Based on the “logic” of these traces, the literary critic might seek to form a “diagram” (always partial and incomplete) of the virtual text that haunts a manifest text.”(Bryant, *Ibid*)

And furthermore,

“Since texts are linguistic, they are clearly representational. But they are more than that. They do not just tell us what reality is like; they give us guidance...*sometimes in order to guide us to a truer conception of reality the texts must misrepresent that very reality*. Likewise, since texts are socio-cultural entities, they are clearly interpretable by hermeneutic strategies devised by humans. But again, they are more than that, for there are surprises in individual texts either at variance with or simply not covered by hermeneutic strategies.” (Cogburn & Ohm, 2014, 14, my emphasis)

This view can be found within strands of geocriticism in contemporary literary theory pioneered by Bertrand Westphal, who stresses that,

“Fiction does not reproduce the real, but actualizes new virtualities that had remained unformulated, and that then go on to *interact* with the real according to the hypertextual logic of interfaces...fiction detects possibilities buried in the folds of the real, knowing that these folds have not been temporalized”(Westphal 2011, 171).

The adoption of this kind of reading *vis a vis* text will become important in later chapters of this thesis, which seek to read the travel writing of radio foreign news in light of these ontologies, through attention to the way in which different space-times are nested within texts themselves. Just as, then, the assemblage is

“an ad hoc group of diverse elements...living throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energy that confounded them from within...The effects generated by an assemblage are...emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone” (Bennett 2010, 21 qtd in Salter 2015, xii),

so too there can be no contradiction in pointing out how the textual exists and behaves as one of the elements affecting other parts of a given assemblage, how it's power and the power of discursive formations within it relate to but do not subsume the material power of the objects and networks within which these texts are located, propagated, amplified etc... The thesis is, then, in part an attempt to "take apart" the radio assemblage and to demonstrate, to the extent that this is possible, the intra-action between material and textual; the sites where the physical infrastructures of radio become, act and are maintained or where discourses are manifested through factual and fictional genres within broadcast networks and texts. This theoretical framework also, I will argue, attends to one of the other major problematics of radio research in the mid twentieth century Cold War context: the absence of any systematic archive of recorded broadcasts. So the *traces* discussed above are rendered in the realm of the text (haunted by prior texts and meanings) but also through the remains of broadcasts (material entities) in the fragments of scripts, memos, letters and maps which constitute the vast majority of the (silent) radio archive.

#### **1.4 Thesis Structure and Chapter outlines**

The thesis progresses over the next 9 chapters, loosely structured into two parts. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 compose the conceptual and theoretical contexts on which the thesis' approach to popular geopolitics and the radio assemblage is grounded whilst simultaneously arguing for the hybridisation of various elements of these theories with existing discursive analytical theories to create a distinct approach to the empirical material which follows. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 relate this empirical material, each chapter offering an illustration of the way in which the radio assemblage can be witnessed at different scales and sites in the Cold War period. These chapters relate the written archive of radio through the analytical lens of this theoretical apparatus, opening up a series of previously unseen documents, encounters and materials to illustrate the utility of the hybrid to read the material and the discursive, the presence and absence of Cold War radio at range of different scales, temporalities and identities.

Chapter 2 conducts a review of the interlinked literatures and concepts on which the thesis draws in order to illustrate the conceptual diversity on which the thesis is based. These literatures, encompassing popular geopolitics, travel writing, journalism and the history of technology are all understood as essential to how radio has been conceived up to this point as a geopolitical medium. These three literatures are then introduced briefly to the first contribution the thesis seeks to make: the selective mobilisation of assemblage, actor network theories (ANT) and Object Oriented Philosophy tools to the study of popular geopolitics, in order to lay the ground for further chapters.

Chapter 3 continues where the previous chapter ends, and embarks on a more detailed conceptual review of key thinkers, debates and principles within the linked theoretical strands of assemblage, ANT and OOO in order to develop further the theoretical ideas discussed above further. In addition to this it also introduces a reading of how post-colonial theories, central to the existing understandings of popular geopolitics can be incorporated into these theoretical frameworks. Following this, the chapter looks to how and to what extent the insights offered by these theoretical propositions can be brought to bear on radio and the geopolitical during the Cold War period, which the empirical body of the thesis takes as its focus. The internal debates, key characteristics, ideas and concepts from these theories and theorists are thus employed with examples as to how we might begin a) to create a flexible, hybrid approach illustrating their utility in studying popular geopolitics and b) some specific examples from the literatures previously discussed, particularly within foreign news, to illustrate these concepts being put into practice.

Chapter 4 turns to more substantive questions of the empirical body of the thesis, particularly in relation to the notions of presence and absence which emerged at the beginning of the project in relation to radio and how this should be addressed more broadly. The chapter gives an account of how this was done, involving archival methodologies, structuring principles and certain research decisions, as these relate to existing methods and methodologies of discourse and content analysis in popular geopolitics, and how the hybridised assemblage approach outlined in the previous chapters was adopted and adapted in the research environment of the multiple written archives of radio engaged during the course of the thesis. The chapter gives justification for the “separate yet linked” structure of the four main empirical chapters,

which each bring into contact different archives with different elements of the theoretical apparatus, in order to demonstrate how the matter and materiality of these archives can be read and written in a new light, one that enlivens both the material and textual dimensions without the reduction of one to the other.

Chapter 5 begins the second section of the thesis, reading a series of narratives drawn from primary research into the written archives of radio, both at the BBC and the National Archives to argue for the value of reading the radio assemblage in light of the theoretical framework, at different sites and scales. These scales are illustrated by archival narratives are selected as emblematic of the way radio's materiality can be seen to exist and circulate within various institutional, territorial and bureaucratic networks, and how this can be illustrated more clearly using the kinds of hybridised theoretical registers mobilised in the earlier chapters. This, the chapter argues, is valuable in contexts where a vast quantity of physical actants are shown to exist relationally, in shifting valences of assemblage, across spaces and times. The construction and operation of a small part of the BBC's Middle Eastern Relay System (MERS), during the period between 1966 and 1968 is engaged to demonstrate how, even in such a tightly focussed case, the actants and forces involved in the production of radio power and radio relations quickly multiplies and expands, involving the traces of radio technologies in historical networked assemblage; intra-organizational tensions, diesel generators, the geopolitics of the Cold War directional antenna post-colonial insurgencies, atmospheric weather patterns, and military logistics are all implicated at the same time, seemingly resisting attempts to contain them within. The chapter further illustrates these complexities through a mapping of the way in which a radio set had to negotiate differential boundaries (both political and physical) in Europe during the 1960's, in order to maintain BBC monitoring posts in major cities to maintain a flow of information on the quality of signal strength.

Chapter 6 takes on a familiar concept in popular geopolitics: that of the popular cultural "serial". Previous studies have focussed largely on the way in which critical discourse analyses can help us narrate the geopolitical contexts and effects of these texts over time, the chapter looks to draw from assemblage theories, a reading of how language and text which could augment these discursive readings. It does this through a reading of a vast archive of foreign news, as found in the scripts of the

BBC radio program *From our own Correspondent (FooC)*, a regular program on the BBC which has existed in the same format for over 50 years. The chapter argues, in line with the hybridised theoretical framework, that although new materialism and its variants are vital to a renewed understanding of the radio assemblage as popular geopolitical medium, text and textuality remains an important component of this assemblage. It concludes that relational materialist theorists such as DeLanda, Bennett and others draw our attention to the way in which linguistic operators can be read as material entities, a hybrid theoretical framework is required which re-affirms the need to retain existing insights of critical and postcolonial discourse analyses identifying power dynamics in media texts are a constant presence in BBC foreign news texts of the Cold War historical context.

Chapter 7 turns the framework to the level of the individual subject as and within radio assemblage, through a reading of the biographical archive of Leonard Parkin (1929-1993), a BBC radio foreign correspondent, as a mode of engaging the position of the professional subject in popular geopolitics. Analysing a series of private correspondence between Parkin and his mother during the 1960's, the chapter argues that this framework of thought can be directed towards individual, gendered subjects within geopolitical media assemblages too, which are demonstrated to be under constant pressure of material and discursive forces both stabilizing and destabilizing their professional and personal identities. These forces range from the sedimentation of discourses and tropes, along with the echoes of various fictional texts within the subject themselves, to more material forces such as technologies and distance, alongside the requirements of professional journalistic subjectivity which "push" and "pull" upon the identity of, in this case, the journalist, particularly in relation to how professional and personal identities are intertwined with gendered notions of subjectivity which also emerge as central questions for contemporary iterations of materialism.

Chapter 8 offers a departure, through an altogether different reading of how we might conceptualise the cultural and political geographies of radio otherwise, through an analysis of some of the sites where radio waves, nuclear politics and cultural representation(s) meet. Drawing strongly on the OOO region of the theoretical

hybrid, the chapter points to various ways of conceptualising the material presence and afterlives of the radio spectrum as phenomena massively distributed in time and space, particularly in relation to how the nuclear politics of the Cold War has can be seen in later artistic and cultural responses to the politics of radio waves. Further to this, it raises the fundamental questions and problems of representation engendered by this. Taking examples from nuclear criticism, conceptual art and scientific history it shows, once more, how thinking in nature/culture discourse/material binaries becomes, if not redundant, then severely limiting, when we approach complex object systems such as radio, even in the relatively narrow fields of political geographies and cultural theory. Chapter 9 offers a set of conclusions based not only on what has gone before, but also poses questions as to how the approaches employed by the thesis might be directed to further research in both historical and contemporary contexts, along with a series of reflections on different modes of conducting this kind of research.

In general terms, then, the thesis looks towards expanding the “cast of characters” involved in the production of popular geopolitical representations, utilising the history of radio as a geopolitical mode through which this can be mobilised. As such, it is approaches the geopolitics of radio as composed of a multiplicity of different forces, texts, individuals, objects and affects. The review in the next chapter will illustrate this further by opening up the idea of radio and the geopolitical to read the different literatures feeding into and informing these concepts and give further force to the ways in which the adoption of a tailored approach to the materialities inherent to radio speaks to these various literatures.





## Chapter 2

# Popular culture, Radio and Geopolitics: Entangled literatures.

### 2.0 Popular geopolitics, a conceptual history

The inter-disciplinary nature of this research project calls for the integration of a number of different literatures across popular culture, world politics, literary studies and media history. As such, this chapter undertakes a selective, focused review of key points in these literatures and places them in dialogue with each other in order to achieve two aims. Firstly to provide a context and setting for the research as a whole which will be followed throughout the thesis, and secondly as a method of leading into the next chapter on theoretical frameworks, which engages a more detailed review of the novel theoretical tools on which this thesis draws. As such, the rest of this chapter will address popular geopolitics as a sub-field, alongside my particular focus on radio broadcasting and news as the empirical lens through which this field is read, alongside literatures on journalism and travel writing in cultural geography and broadcasting and media history of the BBC in order to illustrate the project's concerns and introducing both the theoretical and empirical content of the later chapters.

The concept of popular geopolitics emerges within the context of a broader inter-disciplinary turn in the social sciences and humanities around the mid 1980's, grounded in the adoption and application of various forms of critical theory to the study of geopolitics and international relations. The term stems from a tripartite division coined by scholars of critical geopolitics which delineated the field into "formal" geopolitics (the "traditional" activities of states, leaders and other foreign policy actors); practical geopolitics (the practice(s) of strategy); and popular geopolitics, which concerns the various manner(s) in which both the formal and the practical are constructed, shaped and reinforced at the level of mainstream culture

and everyday practice (Dalby & O'Tuathail 2002). These categorisations are mutually constitutive, rather than hermetic. More specifically, popular geopolitics seeks to synthesise the concerns of political geography with the fields of literary, cultural and media studies. During their infancy, these fields were themselves having to protect hard won gains of "academic respectability" in the face of elitism in regards to the status of "popular" or "mass" culture in the academy (Hall 1980). Demonstrations of the utility of such research programs and sub-fields would, so the argument goes, help both parties. Political Geography (and international relations) would be re-vitalised through an attention to the ways in which their objects and programs of study were represented and experienced at the level of society and culture, whilst the newer disciplines would be able to demonstrate "upwards", how the study of texts and mass-cultural phenomena both effected and were affected by the behaviours of macro-level actors such as states, institutions and organizations. Parallel to this, existing areas of literary studies had recognised the influence of historical patterns of representation on the perception and construction of the post-colonial world were also drawn on for their relevance to the on-going construction of regionalised geopolitical imaginaries, often predicated on notions of difference from or inferiority to the West (Said 1987; O'Tuathail, 1996). The writing of worlds with which these kind of arguments were concerned quickly became adopted by anthropologists and geographers, who stressed the importance of addressing social and historical contexts, institutional settings, authorship and subject positionality as all equally important in understanding how representations of the non-western, the exotic and the Other come to be constituted (Barnes & Duncan 1992, 3).

Some of the works which became central to popular geopolitics emerged only towards the latter part of the 1990's however, particularly Joanne Sharp's *Condensing the Cold War* (1999) and David Campbell's *Writing Security* (1992), both of which studied the way in which particular texts and constructions act (rather than simply represent) in the reinforcement of geopolitical narratives and imaginaries. Sharp argued, for example, that mass cultural periodicals such as the *Readers Digest* are central to any understanding of post-war American identity *vis a vis* foreign policy: a periodical operating as a discursive vehicle to iterate and reinforce the identity constructions and binaries on which Cold War, American foreign policy was predicated at the level of the everyday, in the homes and at the dinner tables of

its citizens. Work such as this led in turn, either directly or indirectly to a variety of research engaging visual texts such as Comic books (Dittmer 2007); political cartoons (Dodds 1996) and film (Weber 2005), to name a few. These projects revolved around the manner in which these texts, as examples of “mass” culture, contain within them identities, narratives and tropes relating particular constructions of the geopolitical to audiences. Popular geopolitics is, then, a way of understanding how the sociology of nationalism is externalised, through identity and boundary construction practices, geographical imaginaries and assumptions, all inscribed and reinforced at the level of everyday practices of popular culture. Additionally, and in line with broader cultural geographical research, the relationship between national identity, popular culture and material objects has been engaged by Edensor (2002), who suggests that the objects of material culture are vital to an understanding of how these identities and boundaries and, concomitantly, the geopolitical comes to be constructed, given that “[t]hey carry meaning because of their contextual emplacement in a network with other elements. They are produced, sold, bought and used and shared in ways which ensure that they interrelate with other people and non-humans within the network” (p.104).

Over the course of this thesis, I will show how this kind of relational understanding can be applied to the BBC radio network of the 1960’s as a popular geopolitical assemblage. This review seeks to situate the thesis broadly within popular geopolitics, but through the empirical sources on which it draws, to also illustrate how this cannot be separated from attendant literatures in journalism, foreign news, travel writing and media theory. These literatures are chosen both for the interdisciplinary themes to which this project both speaks and seeks to make a contribution and for the treatment these literatures will receive in relation to the empirical thrust of the thesis, which seeks to investigate media networks, scripted texts and individual biographies in sequence. Following a discussion of these literatures and how they relate to the critical discursive epistemology/ontology of popular geopolitics, a final section moves towards outlining an alternative theoretical framework, which will be explored fully in the next chapter.

In looking to explore the role of text in performing the “work” of geopolitics, which as Dittmer argues is “[a]bout the assignment of values to places, and [it] constructs hierarchies of people and places that matter and those that do not” (Dittmer, 2010: xvii), one way popular geopolitics is perhaps best witnessed is through news-media, given that this is the predominant mode of popular cultural (non-fictional) representation to which many societies and individuals are exposed most regularly. The very earliest examples of this form can be seen in the *Corantos* or “newsbooks” of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, which chronicled, often in sensationalised, fantastical text and image, the “newes from abroad” (Dahl 1952), predominantly featuring stories of war, siege and displacement of peoples. The differences between these apparently primitive modes of information circulation and today’s news media are hardly pronounced. Francois Debrix (2007), for example, points to the construction and reproduction of insecurity and fear within American news-media ecologies which utilise sensationalised, tabloid discourses of threat in order to remove nuance and complexity from the presentation of world politics, often with the support of “professionals of geopolitics” (Kuus 2008), at the level of formal geopolitics and an emerging class of foreign policy “pundits”. To attend to the ways in which various media languages and grammars shape the scripting of foreign affairs news is to take further existing critiques of news-media. Such approaches have engaged in comparative case studies of newspaper conflict reporting in order to show how these representations illustrate that, for example, in the regional interventions in Kosovo and South Ossetia, “[s]overeignty is uneven, contingent and performative.. [where similar situations are] nevertheless narrated differently by [US] newspaper reporters whose coverage was structured by their own subjectivities, cultural/economic milieu and practices” (Dittmer & Parr 2011, 138). Similarly Myers, Klak & Koehl (1996) point to differential degrees of Otherness discernible in Western news-media discourses covering the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda, which further illustrates the ways in which these situated representations of non-western space are not homogenous (see also Campbell 1998). This being said, these narrations almost always operate intertextually, across generic domains of “factual” representation (such as news) and “fictional” representation in films, novels, theatre or comic books. Underlying this, though, are a wider set of ideas around how the (re)production of the geopolitical world(s) at the level of the everyday are conducted and the symbolic

value of various markers and discourses produced by this within the field of popular culture. Michael Billig, in *Banal Nationalism*, another central text in the literature, suggests that it is the silent, unproblematic re-inscription of the nation, national identity and the demarcation of “here” and “there” that is central to the logic of the geopolitical precisely because it is so rarely brought into question (See also Campbell 1992; Weber 2006). As Billig puts it, it is these “ideological habits, by which 'our' nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed” which are instilled and reinforced through popular culture (1995, 6). Mainstream mass-media, especially news media, are invested with a varying degree of national identifications which as a consequence of globalization may be identified as part of a wider, global culture but which nonetheless can generally be attached to certain nation-states (i.e. CNN with the United States or, as we shall see, the BBC with the UK). Popular geopolitics, then, adopts critical geopolitics’ de-naturalising of these hegemonic regimes of national and consequently geopolitical knowledge, truth and practice, specifically in relation to how popular cultural representations, including those in news, are essential to the construction and maintenance of these regimes in the national and, international sphere. The role of culture in these process of inscribing the seemingly “universal truths” of international relations and foreign policy, for example inside/outside and self/other (Walker 1993), in conjunction with the scripting of the internal logic of the nation as a homogenous, teleological entity so as to justify the de-legitimation of any challenge to these “logics” (Shapiro 2004) are perennial questions for popular geopolitics, and exemplified here by Dittmer, who uses the example of Captain America comic books to illustrate that:

“Horizontal differentiation of the other through boundary-making processes is, in part, accomplished through the use of (geo) political narratives that establish a vertical bonding between the scales of the individual and the nation...popular culture helps establish that link, thereby connecting millions of individuals into a collective identity”(Dittmer 2007, 404-405).

News operates on a similar, if more subtle level than periodic fiction or comics. It is regularised, standardised and linked to clock-time (and hence modernity) in the everyday lifeworld of popular culture. Newspapers arrive in predictable places at predictable times; radio and television bulletins are broadcast, generally, at regular intervals, with longer programs marking points in the day. News is, then, a popular cultural ecology in its own right, and one deserving of further attention in national

cultures. To expand this out further, I will now move to a linked review of some of the literature on national broadcasters and in particular the BBC, as producers of these representations, moving towards how we might think of both news and news production as something perhaps more than purely a set of discursive constructions of “inside/outside” and, more importantly, how seeing broadcast news in this light might open up further avenues for understanding popular geopolitics in a new light.

## **2.1 Symbolic-Material Broadcasting: The BBC and Popular Geopolitics**

Having outlined popular geopolitics’ explicit relationship to foreign news, I now propose that national broadcasters particularly the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), provides a ready-made example of how these concepts can be seen to work in practice. The national identity/identification, for example, produced and producing the BBC is not a simplistic iteration of symbolic jingoism, but nor is it simply a text which can be “read” in any kind of uniform manner. Instead it relies on its membership of a diverse range of affective identifications in which national identity may be invested or constructed at any given time, often unpredictably and in response to contingency. Under these kinds of readings we may think of contemporary nationalism “[n]ot as the way a body of people consciously defines itself but as a pool of affects or partial objects...A collective body is produced through such images which have both a direct affect, and then a reflective affect as we see the workings of these images on others” (Colebrook 2006, 56). This kind of affective attunement in the context of national identity refers simply to the capacity for affective identification with various objects of a given nation *x* as influenced/formulated, although not defined by various non-national subject positions. Additionally, in this case, the concept of attunement should be taken not only metaphorically but conceived as a material capacity/apparatus of a body or group of bodies to *receive* affects. Mobilising this language as an illustrative metaphor both for national identities and the geopolitical, the media can be seen as one particular “frequency” of cultural affect through which these registers can be seen to emerge. This is to say a dual process, whereby *what* is broadcast becomes

fused to the institutional vector dictating *how* it is broadcast<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps the most important point of adopting this kind of reading though is that, in this process, the material technologies of broadcast are regarded as equally relevant to the discursive-semantic content of the broadcasts themselves.

I illustrate this point here because it opens up the possibility of a symbolic-material mode of thinking about broadcasting, specifically radio broadcasting, which will form a central plank of my arguments in this thesis. Early modes of this kind of thinking can be found from an unusual source, in Franz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (1959). In the text, Fanon discusses the importance of the semi-clandestine radio station "The voice of fighting Algeria" to the reinforcement of the imagined community of Algerian anti-colonial fighters during the war of independence in the 1950's. Fanon's description engages in precisely the kind of networked mapping I intend to undertake here, and hence is reproduced at length. It takes on the importance of *both* the medium *and* the message, initially discussing the political-legal frameworks of governance under which the material objects of radio came to be controlled and restricted, once it was realised how potent they were to the revolutionary ecology,

"The Voice of Fighting Algeria was to be of capital importance in consolidating and unifying the people...The fragments and splinters of acts gleaned by the correspondent of a newspaper more or less attached to the colonial domination, or communicated by the opposing military authorities, lost their anarchic character and became organized into a national and Algerian political idea, assuming their place in an overall strategy of reconquest of the people's sovereignty...Having a radio meant paying one's taxes to the nation, buying the right of entry into the struggle of an assembled people. The French authorities, however, began to realize the importance of this progress of the people in the technique of news dissemination. After a few months of hesitancy legal measures appeared. The sale of radios was now prohibited, except on presentation of a voucher issued by the military security or police services. The sale of battery sets was absolutely prohibited, and spare batteries were practically withdrawn from the market" (Fanon 1959, 68).

before moving to a description of the affective attunement is intrinsically linked to the materiality of radio waves themselves, and their ability to act at a distance, between bodies, groups, nations and ideologies:

"Here we come upon a phenomenon that is sufficiently unusual to retain our attention. The highly trained French services, rich with experience acquired in modern wars, past masters in the practice of 'sound-wave-warfare', were quick to

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<sup>2</sup> To be clear, this is not a question of editorial "line" or "balance", rather the network of sonic and visual codes, settings and delivery which mark the corporate "style" of a given institution/show/broadcaster.

detect the wavelengths of the broadcasting stations. The programmes were then systematically jammed, and the voice of Fighting Algeria soon became inaudible. A new form of struggle had come into being. Tracts were distributed telling the Algerians to keep tuned in for a period of two or three hours. In the course of a single broadcast a second station, broadcasting over a different wavelength, would relay the first jammed station. The listener, enrolled in the battle of the waves, had to figure out the tactics of the enemy, and in an almost physical way circumvent the strategy of the adversary. Very often only the operator, his ear glued to the receiver, had the unhopd-for opportunity of hearing the Voice” (Ibid: 69, emphasis in original)

These dynamics emerge again if we consider the differences between nation-states with a history of public service broadcasting as opposed to those without. The radio historian Michelle Hilmes (2006) has shown that the mass proliferation of radio technologies into the public and private sphere during the 1920’s led to the establishment of markedly differing governance frameworks in the US and Europe, with the former rejecting absolutely the notion of centrally funded, state sponsored public broadcasting in favour of private entrepreneurialism, with the latter, including Great Britain, favouring a much closer control and sponsorship of broadcasting, largely on grounds of national interest, initially through the Post Office, then the British Broadcasting Company (1922) and then finally the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1927. Lord Asa Briggs’ multi-volume *A History of the BBC* remains not only the most comprehensive work written on the corporation but also a major document of British cultural history in its own right. Within this vast text, though, lies a recognition that the early years of the BBC were a constant struggle for a sense of identity *vis a vis* the country, nation and empire in relation to the new medium and how, exactly, it should be used both stylistically, as an instrument of representation, but also affectively as a mode of binding together individuals and groups widely distributed in space:

“The art of live commentary took time to develop. The more elaborate attempts to combine narrative with music and actuality material could give rise to uneasy transitions between the symbolic and the real. But the problems went deeper than style. *How should such abstract entities as empire or nation be represented?* If the broadcasters drew on older cultural traditions, on history of folk music and poetry, the material might bypass large sections of their audience. If they dealt with the contemporary and actual it might give rise to controversy. There were fissures within the imaginary unity of empire and nation: there was India, there was Ireland. To reference such divisions would defeat the purpose of the programmes. Perhaps the idealized and the actual could be combined if the perfect typification could be found; a location that embodied the essence of Britishness, a New Zealand farmer who might serve as a model for colonial virtue and honest loyalty. Producers explored a range of possibilities but none provided an obvious way out of their difficulties” (Briggs 1965: 286, my emphasis)

The BBC is a vital component of national identity on a symbolic level, then, but to externalise into the realm of the geopolitical, it is engaged in a writing both *of* and *on* the world through its, broadcasts, journalists and infrastructures alongside its imaginaries, symbols and discourses; it constructs the world linguistically and symbolically through its journalists *for* its audiences, but also constructs and operates a material world which allows these constructions to be broadcast. As such, this thesis looks to draw on the literature discussed above relating to the role of the BBC as a national broadcaster in the production of geopolitical identities, but using a very specific set of theoretical frameworks to be identified in the next chapter, in order to give equal weighting to the material “things”, components and objects of broadcast networks along with the world-construction and meaning-making done by the broadcasts themselves.

The idea of materiality and the non-human in geopolitics is hardly strange or alien, although it emerges primarily in terms of organismic and deterministic metaphors in the past. This is because the progenitors of classical geopolitics were deeply informed by the natural sciences, particularly Darwin and Humboldt. This is particularly true in the case of Freidrich Ratzel and even the “father” of geopolitics, Halford Mackinder himself. For these thinkers, the existence, behaviour and survival of states, nations, even civilizations, should be thought in terms of the competitive struggle for existence, often conflating (as some do to this day) the theories of Darwin with Malthus, Lamarck and Herbert Spencer into a teleological, racialised “master biology” which could be applied to all types of living entities and through this to the organic whole of the nation state (Kearns, 2009). At the level of formal and practical geopolitics, contemporary (particularly American) “intellectuals of statecraft” have also employed the language of sickness and health; fitness, virility, decline and impotence when drawing their (bodily) geo-political topographies (e.g. Luttwak 2010). Similarly, in popular geopolitics, the symbolic and the non-human (animal) are routinely employed metonymically in both banal and substantive nationalist discourses. We need only think of the national embodiments associated with, for example, adoptions of (British) lions and (Indian) tigers and (Russian) bears to remind us of this.

One of the implications of thinking about popular geopolitics in a material register enables the opening up of the field to a much wider “cast of characters” (Depledge,

2013), including objects, technologies, infrastructures, which intuitively stand out or apart from the ideas of text, textuality and discourse that do not seem to fully capture them. This is not to say that they are evacuated of all relevance to these concerns, but instead are granted a more equal platform from which to be addressed, rather than mute signifiers or carriers of discourses or semiotics. Such an approach, the one I advocate for here, takes an institution (the BBC) as a producer and creator of geopolitical representations but seeks to argue that this kind of assemblage of actors involved in the production of these representations should not be limited to individual incarnations of geopolitical (human) subjectivity. Instead reading these subjects and texts as composed of multiple other patterns of relations, coalescing sometimes only briefly to produce any given instance of representation, scripting or power projection. It is these kinds of technical systems and technological objects that Andrew Barry (2013) has recently brought into dialogue with networked sociologies to map the organizational disputations entangled with material artefacts along the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. In this case, the “geo” of geopolitics and geopower is found to be, not merely a case of layers of discursive hegemonies laid down by purely human actors and systems of language or power- as existing accounts of critical geopolitics suggests-but also equally important sets of micro-macro geopolitical associations and agencies between and within material objects, organisations and events. These associations, agencies and relations hold for unspecified and often unpredictable periods of time, sometimes in coalition with but at others in defiance of human agency and will.

The existing literature on the role of BBC radio in geopolitics is limited, and largely focussed on historical studies of media, with Fanon’s evocative and detailed reading of the material-symbolic networks of radio being inexplicably neglected. In his PhD thesis *Radio Geopolitics*, which remains the notable exception to this, and the only work to deal with some of these questions directly, although within the context of a more traditional historical-political geography, Alistair Pinkerton (2007) argues for two conceptions of how radio geopolitics is to be conceived. Firstly, *radio power*, which is conceived of as a historical account of the differential development of radio worldwide, and secondly *radio relations*, which speaks to the concerns of radio as “[a] tool of cultural exchange and public diplomacy”(Pinkerton 2007, 10) similar to Joseph Nye’s (2004) articulation of “soft power”. The benefit of studying radio at all

for popular geopolitics though, lies in a perceived *over attention* to the role of the visual and visual technologies in the production of geopolitical representations, not simply in recent years but at the core of geopolitical thought:

“[t]he intellectual tradition of geopolitics has long been preoccupied with the visual whether it be in the form of the Olympian gaze or mastery and other representations of global geopolitical space...One only has to consider how radio listening often involves looking at the radio transmitter to appreciate that it may well be a case of simply acknowledging a visual predominance. As a form of ‘mixed media’, radio and film (for instance) involve a braiding and nesting of the senses.” (Pinkerton & Dodds 2008,19)

The challenge for studying radio however remains the paucity of an early archive of recordings of speech radio, particularly news or foreign affairs programming. A degree of methodological and conceptual innovation will be required, then, to practice what Dittmer & Gray (2010) have called for in terms of a “Popular geopolitics 2.0”, which begins to bring the insights of post-human, affective and assemblage based methodological frameworks to bear on the study of the relationship between geopolitics and popular culture, which takes as a central claim the need for “[a] networked ontology, which links together the people associated with media and the objects necessary for the constitution of the media in a techno-cultural assemblage the effect of which is ‘the media’(2010, 1673). It is, then, within this recent theoretical and methodological turn within critical and popular geopolitics that this thesis is situated.

## **2.2 Journalism and Travel Writing in Popular Geopolitics**

To address the role of the BBC as a symbolic-material assemblage in popular geopolitics is impossible without recognising the role of journalism in this assemblage. The culturally educative role of the BBC in relation to its journalism and current affairs is central to the organisation as a whole. The progression and acculturation of the listening subject was explicitly linked to an awareness and knowledge of events, politics and world affairs – a knowledge which BBC radio was designed to provide. It is no coincidence that the first two components of the BBC’s mantra, “Educate, Inform and Entertain” were always regarded as the most important in its earlier years: one could not hope to become informed unless one was educated

(entertainment was reluctantly included). The by-product of this was the creation of a geographical imaginary through current affairs and other representational mediations, utilising a journalism whose style was rooted in a cultural paternalism that (re) produced the world for the benefit of the listener at home. Such imaginaries are consistently important to popular geopolitics, particularly given that

“The ubiquity of geographic representations, can lead to feelings of disorientation—which images are real and which are false...there is no way to independently describe somewhere, it can only be done through the use of analogy to other ideas, places and peoples. Even if you describe a place as “hot” or “polluted,” you are analogizing that place to either your personal reference point (home, perhaps) or to a mythical “average” place. It seems obvious that within even the span of just a few years we can become aware of how culturally situated our past thoughts are.”(Dittmer 2010, 49)

The substantive empirical focus of this thesis will focus on three points in the assemblage of the BBC relevant to its popular geopolitical representations, with the current literature on journalism and travel writing in relation to international politics will provide one major strand of detailing what has come before. The second strand, which operates relatedly, rather than in isolation, is work which relates to media organisations, infrastructures and technologies in popular geopolitics, as it is in the crossing over of these two literatures that the ontology of assemblage becomes most useful in illustrating how these human-textual-technological multiples can be said to come into being. It is within this context that foreign correspondents certainly exist to “educate and inform”, they also may be said to “entertain” in a certain way through their textual performances.

The foreign correspondent is, then, part journalist, part travel writer. Although often she seems to suffer from the criticisms applied to both and none of the respect afforded to either. Journalism has traditionally been seen as something of a poor relation in the hierarchal aesthetics of literature. If, as Debbie Lisle (2006) argues, the travel writer is often looked down upon by the novelist, as creating the “impure” fact/fiction of the travelogue, where are we to locate the foreign affairs journalist? The foreign correspondent, in the ecology of journalism, is perhaps regarded as the most glamorous and lucrative of postings (although in practice the jet-setting, first-class, five-star lifestyle could often today not be further from the truth) available to the career journalist. It often carries a higher profile than other areas of reportage and, in the case of television journalists, often guarantees day-to-day interaction with

global elites and audiences. Foreign news correspondents are often among the most recognisable public media personalities in national news environments, precisely because of the regularity of their appearances. Furthermore, they have been considered in critical geopolitical research as potentially agential, in the sense that the ubiquity of media representations creates audiences which are so great that the influence of those who address audiences of such magnitudes cannot be discounted.

Journalists and journalism are also present in the literature in popular culture and world politics relating to the representation of distant Others. These literatures, emerging late in the twentieth century have addressed phenomena such as 24-hour modern news, engaging questions of imagery (Virilio 1989), simulacra (Baudrillard 1994) and geo-political aesthetics (Jameson, 1992), all of which were deployed as explanatory tools in accounting for the seeming power of images not simply to *reflect* world events, but increasingly to *act* to bring them about (see Chouliaraki 2006a, 2006b; Urry & Szerszynski 2002; Livingston 1997). The language of vectors and deterritorialization enabled by instantaneous satellite communications and the “virtual geographies” this engendered was, broadly, the theoretical paradigm on which much of this work rested (see, e.g. Wark, 1994). However, towards the end of the 1990’s, as the belief in the capacity of media either to compel an effective response to suffering and violence waned, the question remained regarding the extent to which it was ever really responsible for doing this in the first place (Robinson 1999).

Parallel to this, studies of travel writing and exploration discourse in historical-cultural geography have largely centred on the textual-discursive, Foucauldian paradigm similar to O’Tuathail’s *Critical Geopolitics*. These inter-disciplinary works are often to be found at the juncture of literary theory and cultural geography (e.g. Barnes & Duncan 1992, Duncan & Gregory, 2002; Pratt 1992). The appealing logic (hegemony) of world-text/text-world ontologies has only recently begun to be challenged through attention to forms of affective literary/textual critique (e.g. Pedwell 2013, Saldanah 2010), suggesting the possibility of reading something “outside” or not totally encapsulated by the text. This is to take further the idea that “Representation is never a simple literary event: reading, writing and interpretation

are political acts that involve complex power relations between readers, writers and the social worlds they inhabit” (Lisle 2006, 11).

Edward Said (1989) identifies travel writing as one of the key genres through which the tropes and structures of Orientalist knowledge production can be observed. For Said, the role of the Orient is not to exist *in itself*, but to serve as a mirror, or object through which the Occidental narrative of enlightenment, progress and rationality can be reflected back against the irrationality, backwardness and sensuality of the Orient. Lisle also points out that the genre itself comes with its own set of conventions, and politics; concerned not only with the delivery of “time/space specific facts and events to audiences in intelligible ways” (2006, 33) but also by a vacillation between fiction and non-fiction as modes through which these facts were to be transmitted. This is important when we consider in later chapters, the way in which journalism (supposedly concerned exclusively with the transmission of facts) similarly engages in practices in which textual assemblages of fact and fiction, nested time-spaces and broadcast talk sit together and demonstrate themselves as integral to the study of world politics as such. David Spurr (1998) speaks to the roots of these conventions in literary studies through the identification of interlinked patterns of representation in imperial imaginaries. For Spurr, these may act individually or in combination(s) to produce a series of more or less observable tropes across travel writing and journalism in colonial discourse, persisting into the present. The cultural history of travel (writing) emerges, though, from the medieval idea of the pilgrimage, particularly in the sense of this kind of journey – the internal, spiritual journey – being privileged over the external, Euclidian journey (Lisle 2006: 44; see also Todorov 1984). As Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubies discuss in their *Cultural History of Travel*,

“The cultural history of travel is best seen as a dialectic of dominant paradigms between two poles, which we might define as the transcendental vision of pilgrimage and the open-ended process which typically characterizes modernity...Just as the open-endedness which characterizes travel in modernity can be traced to the open-endedness of scientific enquiry, critical scepticism and anthropological speculation of the Graeco-Roman world, so the archetypally Christian pilgrimage model of the Middle Ages is rooted in the ancient myths of heroes such as Apollonius, who travelled himself into sainthood, or the allegorical Odysseus, whose journeys became a metaphor for the spiritual progress of his readers lives”(Elsner & Rubies 1999, 15)

Alternatively, however, the direction of travel may not always be framed in this way, as “Travel may be from the periphery to a stronger, if none the less exotic culture; and in a more contemporary guise, to the metropolitan centre” (Clark 1999, 5). With these diverse origins, we would do well to re-situate the logic of travel writing within the context of this research in general. Returning to the earlier sections, it is included as a way of connecting the popular geopolitical “work” conducted by the BBC as a broadcaster: through organizational behaviours, technological infrastructures, broadcast programs and individual journalists. Whilst the BBC was formed with the mandate to “educate, inform and entertain” it is, specifically, a journalistic organisation and, moreover, one deeply involved in the reporting of foreign news. Its relevance in this respect comes, in part, from work in the field which has considered audiences and audience typologies of consumers of popular geopolitics, work which often does not take the meanings of texts simply *as given* but as constituted through the interaction between audience and work (Dittmer & Larsen 2007; Dittmer & Gray 2010; Dittmer & Dodds 2013). Supplementary to this are various readings of the figure of the foreign news journalist as particular kind of travel writer, one with a degree of geopolitical agency (Pinkerton 2012); one of many “professionals of geopolitics” whose everyday work acts to write, reinforce or otherwise spatialize the narratives of geopolitics, “invoking classified information, institutional insight, and long-term experience in ways that others cannot” (Kuus 2008, 2064). Foreign affairs journalists are, then, integral to geopolitical world construction for public consumption by virtue of their positionality and credibility (personal and institutional) but are also constituted (at least in part) by a series of generic conventions bound up with imperial discourses of travel writing.

Foreign correspondents then, travelling to or temporarily inhabiting the site of events/news might be read as “secular pilgrims” of modernity, with witnessing and representation as twin deities; their reports situate the reader/listener within the field of knowledge, of *world knowledge*, engaged in the opening up of horizons of travel for the listener or viewer without the need *to travel*. They are, though, often unfurnished with the space or time to create the expansive, detailed narratives of contemporary travel writers (although as we shall see later, this is not always the case). The journalist emerges as a professional “character” after the growth of the public sphere, the ubiquity of newspapers and value attached to information

circulation and discussion within societies (Habermas 1989), although the initial hybrid of the journalist and scientific (colonial) explorer comes about very much as a consequence of imperial imaginaries, strategies and practices of codification and domination undertaken from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. This genealogy bears special mention as it is central to the evolution of the geopolitics of information:

“The nineteenth century foreign newspaper reporter or correspondent working in the popular press saw himself in a sense as the rightful heir of the great explorers; he looked at the world as his object, of which he and his civilization were the subjects. Indeed much newspaper reporting was deeply involved in the problems of colonial and other conquest as the more powerful civilizations shared out the available regions of influence. War reporting in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth has only helped further to entrench the imperial imagery which lies at the heart of Western journalism. (Smith 1980, 23)

This typology finds support in other disciplines, as Alexa Robertson & Ulf Hannerz in sociology and anthropology respectively, have taken the idea of the contemporary foreign correspondent as a distinct subject position as the basis for particular studies of foreign news. Hannerz suggests the “tribe” of the foreign correspondent exists as a highly distinct journalistic identity, although his focus is largely on the newspaper correspondent in the contemporary age. Robertson draws on Hannerz to widen the scope of this and problematize the cosmopolitan assumptions of post-modern journalism

“Hannerz has suggested that cosmopolitanism can have a narcissistic streak, in that the self is constructed in the space where cultures mirror one another. When the viewer, in this analogy, encounters the other through the looking glass, understandings are expanded: ‘a little more of the world is somehow under control’ (1990, 240). In the examples shown here, the reporter could be said to play the role of the self, insofar as he is a representative of the viewer, from the same culture, standing in for him or her lending his eyes and other senses sharing his experiences...the world is somehow under control because the viewer is protected from it by the knowledgeable correspondent who keeps it at arm’s length.”(Robertson 2010, 49).

It certainly bears mentioning that both Hannerz and Robertson are based in and draw much of their empirical research from Sweden and Swedish media (although Robertson does give more of a comparative perspective across North Western Europe). Sweden is often regarded as a highly cosmopolitan country and both Robertson and Hannerz research should be seen in this context, that is to say different from countries such as the UK, where state funded broadcasters such as the BBC (and consequently their employees) are grounded in a different set of (post-

imperial) histories. If travel narratives are distinct from autobiographies in their concern for multiple trajectories of selves, rather than a singular narrative, then foreign correspondents are (or often try to be) seen as travel writers *without* self. However, as we shall see, the definition which seeks to locate travel writers in a system of knowledge production “in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data” (Fussell 1980, 203) is not strictly applicable to the correspondent (the public correspondent), where the distant or unfamiliar data must be presented *evacuated* of autobiographical narrative. We will see in the chapters that follow, however, that this distinction does not always hold, and in certain contexts, the generic conventions of travel writing are often observable in the discourse of the foreign correspondent, especially in the scripting of foreign affairs news as carried out by BBC radio correspondents both in their public and private discourses.

### **2.3 Popular Geopolitics, technology and “The Media”**

By way of synthesising the diverse literatures which have gone before, and setting the scene for the rest of the thesis, I want to consider the specific question of how we can consider them together, given that “foreign news” in the contemporary world results from the interplay of modes of travel writing with modern technology, alongside existent questions about the representation of geopolitical world(s). How do technologies affect foreign news (conceived as a type of travel writing) and, concomitantly, radio broadcasting (as a mode of address)? To be sure, the titular motif chosen by Holland & Huggan in *Tourists with Typewriters* (2000) is telling: If the colonial explorer or early travel writer was defined in large part by the objects and equipment (s)he carried with her, then the modern foreign correspondent’s technological luggage has similarly increased in weight. The creation of a geographic imaginary through the representation of distant places by mass, technologically enabled mediation had, by the mid twentieth century, to evolve another set of problematics related to ethical and empathetic identification. Where previously,

foreign news journalism overlapped heavily with travel-writing and ethnography (forms of co-presence, albeit mediated by “proper” distance), and the imperialisms implicit in this were to a large extent removed from second-order ethical deliberations, these issues were not totally absent from representations prior to this. With the emergence of mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century globalization, technologies of action-at-a-distance and mass mediation were thought to have led to the development of more expansive fields of responsibility, or cosmopolitan consciousness<sup>3</sup>. The media theorist Lille Chouliaraki’s view on the relationship between the “spectatorship of suffering” engendered by modern media technologies and the technologies themselves is this:

“Technology closes the moral distance between spectators and sufferers and so cultivates a cosmopolitan disposition in public life, yet, at the same time, it fictionalizes suffering and leads spectators to indifference. This is the paradox of technology. If looking *through* the screen immerses spectators in suffering as authentic reality, as social theory tells us, looking *at* the screen reminds them of the reality of the medium that disseminates suffering as spectacle and fiction.”(Chouliaraki 2006, 37-38)

Without disputing too much the ethical problematic behind Chouliaraki’s claim, I want to suggest that looking *at* the screen, or listening *to* a radio contains within it a more fundamental phenomenological relationship than that of a simple collapsing of distance and proximity, a relationship that speaks directly back to Fanon’s reading of the materiality of radio at the beginning of this chapter. A crucial difference, too, between radio (with which I am concerned here) and television, is the ambiguous spaces created by radio. This point has been argued in non-representational geographies too, with reference to radio sports commentaries where, “the event is not defined by the frame of the screen, but continues to ‘occupy’ a voluminous space of variable intensity that expands and contracts, a space composed of noise, sound, voice” (McCormack 2013, 225). This illustration of the expansive spaces radio *creates*, by virtue of its materiality and the material networks within which it is embedded as opposed to simply occupying, speaks to a further relevant movement

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<sup>3</sup> And although the veracity of these assumptions has been brought into question, it is not the place of this thesis to engage directly in a discussion of the way in which cosmopolitan ethics may or may not have become more or less pronounced in late modernity than previously. I assume the *capacity* for this to occur as having increased with the ubiquity of technologies of representation, rather than being over-determined by it.

in popular geopolitics towards phenomenology, as experienced through the technologies of representation composing “the media” (Dittmer & Gray 2010, 1673).

For some strands of phenomenology, as related to geography and technology, at the most basic level, the distance being collapsed and the technologies supposedly compressing the world are far from simple or linear in their causes or effects (see Thrift & May 2001). Contemporary readings of Martin Heidegger’s work take seriously his key claim that what is achieved in the collapsing of distance is, in fact, the creation of a general “distancelessness”, which is often confused with “closeness” or “proximity” (Heidegger, 1956, see also Harman, 2010). This is in large part to do with the way in which Heidegger’s metaphysics conceives of these terms and, crucially, human/object relations. For Heidegger these terms cannot be thought of as possessing a unified, coherent and consistent *presence* and are always found holding back or withdrawing certain faces, certain qualities or facets of their being. As such, to speak of one “thing” as being closer or further away than another by virtue of technology is to misunderstand the way in which these objects work. Referencing Franz Kafka’s novel *The Castle*, the author and artist Tom McCarthy highlights how fiction expresses this problematic perfectly:

“In *The Castle*: where K. phones the castle, he is always put on hold. He describes hearing a kind of static on the line, which is like children’s voices, singing at a distance of just beyond the range of proper hearing. The phone never lets you to the castle; it just makes it more concealed. In these passages, technology is not bringing things near but it is expanding the here into an infinite space.” (McCarthy 2013, 2)

One way of writing about the literature discussed above on journalism, travel writing, popular geopolitics and this problem of technology and distance is to look at the relations between political geography and Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT), conceived in part as a response to the growing recognition at the increasing inseparability of science and technology from what we think of as society and the social world. Latour’s most explicit iteration of this position can be found in *ARAMIS or, The love of technology* (1993), in which an experimental transit technology was shown to have failed because of a lack of successful negotiation between its human and non-human, institutional and infrastructural components, rather than linear models of causation. Latour begins this work with a deceptively simple set of questions:

“Can we unravel the tortuous history of a state-of-the-art technology from beginning to end, as a lesson to the engineers, decision-makers, and users whose daily lives, for better or for worse, depend on such technology? Can we make the human sciences capable of comprehending the machines they view as inhuman, and thus reconcile the educated public with bodies it deems foreign to the social realm? Finally, can we turn a technological object into the central character of a narrative, restoring to literature the vast territories it should never have given up—namely, science and technology?” (Latour 1990a, *vii*).

More directly relevant, as Andrew Barry has pointed out, is the fact that in Latour’s earlier work, “The relation between ANT and political geography should have been clearly evident (since *Science in Action*), which ends with a remarkable analysis of the circulation of records necessary for the generation of maps about foreign lands. In this way, the use of what Latour called inscription devices, including compasses and sextants enabled imperial centres to both visualise distant lands and, in this way, to ‘act at a distance’” (Barry 2013, 415). Here the germ of a further link between travel writing and technological networks can be seen: the “writing” of “foreign lands” is never *just* an act of representation or domination, but always something more.

What this adoption of Latour’s epistemology does for the study of foreign news and technologies of mediation is to displace the primacy given to the subject-screen-subject “viewing” relationship. Instead, it creates a world in which the mediatized relationship between the spectator and the Other *through* or *in* the screen (or any other media) is just one, non-privileged relationship in a much wider network of relations including, but not limited to: the screen or radio itself; the materiality and distortions of the transmission it broadcasts; the power relations which sustain its dominance as an accepted representation of reality; the micro-social relations of bureaucratic pressure on editors and managers within the studio; the political leanings of major shareholders of media corporations; the biographical trajectories of individual journalists or inter-textual relations informing the texts of broadcasts. This messy topography offers significant benefits and not a few risks to the study of popular geopolitics. It introduces the idea that “All human action finds itself lodged amidst countless items of supporting equipment: the most nuanced debates in a laboratory stand at the mercy of a silent bedrock of floorboards, bolts, ventilators, gravity and atmospheric oxygen” (Harman 2009, 18), which, whilst providing genuinely novel insight brings with it the risk of dissolving genuine ethical and political concerns raised by the representation of distant place into the aesthetic-

poetic even-splatter of juxtaposed relational difference commonly referred to as the “Latour litany” (Bogost 2012). As I will argue in more detail in the theoretical framework which is to follow, the aesthetic value of the litany to appreciating (possibly understanding, but not necessarily) the complexity of the relation space created by media is of no little value in and of itself and, far from dissolving ethico-political concerns, may actually help to bring them into sharper focus.

The vibrancy of thinking these kinds of ontologies, however, should not blind us to a key point: that popular geopolitics is primarily concerned with understanding how and why Other places and subjects come to be represented and understood to/by “us” (irrespective of who “them” or “us” happen to be in any given context) and consequently the critical discursive analysis of texts remains a central component of this. The next chapter looks to take these theoretical concerns further, and argue for how they might enable (rather than be “applied”) thinking popular geopolitics differently. The neo-materialist philosopher Dianna Coole also argues for the value of this kind of epistemology/ontology to the study of history and international politics in general, in order to take on

“A reckoning of the material circuits, flows and experiences that mark the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A capacious historical materialism from this perspective will need to integrate detailed, empirical, fine-grained studies of micro-level phenomena with attention to intermediate structures of political economy and broader macro-level systems. Since the latter include the geopolitical as well as the ecological, while at every level there is a particular interest in the ways materiality is pervaded by power relations, international relations has a crucial role to play here” (Coole 2013, 453)

For my purposes, what this indicates is how we can begin to consider popular geopolitics as having a circuitry which is, nevertheless, not reducible to nor derived from any over-determined series of other factors (power, language, text etc..). The challenge is to show how they work together, translate, succeed and fail in their operation. This is what is missing from popular geopolitics, and something that this thesis explicitly sets out to address. Coole gives further flesh to the way in which reading “agentic capacities” in international studies “Means tracing politico-economic, geopolitical and biophysical circuits, conduits and networks through which matter passes as it is transformed, given surplus value, degraded, rerouted, hoarded and soon.”(Ibid, 456). Thinking about popular culture in this way is challenging, as it goes against certain established modes of interpretation and hermeneutics, and

employs a significant degree of philosophical speculation. Opening up popular geopolitics to a post-human sensibility whilst still holding to the importance of individual texts and discourses concerning, for example, the distinction between “home” and “foreign” or “self” and “other” requires flexibility both to objects of research and methods.

More specifically, it raises the question of how “I” and “They” are, to an extent, sometimes-marginal actants in the functioning of large, sometimes impossibly large objects. In the case of popular culture, an investigation of radio and journalism, for example, expands quickly to massive object systems like the electromagnetic spectrum. The novelist and critic David Foster Wallace illustrates the expressive power of this kind of thinking when he discusses the apparent stunting of the practice of fiction writing in a contemporary society in thrall to the “voyeurism” of television watching:

“TV “voyeurism” involves a whole gorgeous orgy of illusions for the pseudo-spy, when we watch. Illusion (1) is that we’re voyeurs here at all: the voyees behind the screen’s glass are only pretending ignorance. They know perfectly well we’re out there. And that we’re there is also very much on the minds of those behind the second layer of glass, the lenses and monitors via which technicians and arrangers apply no small ingenuity to hurl the visible images at us. What we see is far from stolen; it’s proffered-illusion (2). And, illusion (3), what we’re seeing through the framed pane isn’t people in real situations that do or even could go on without consciousness of Audience. What young writers are scanning for data on some reality to fictionalize is *already* composed of fictional characters in highly ritualized narratives. Plus, (4), we’re not even seeing “characters” at all: it’s not Major Frank Burns, pathetic self-important *putz* from Fort Wayne, Indiana; it’s Larry Linville of Ojai, California, actor stoic enough to endure thousands of letters (still coming, even in syndication) from pseudo voyeurs mistakenly berating him for being a *putz*. And, if (5) isn’t too out-there for you, it’s ultimately of course not even actors we’re spying, not even people: it’s EM-propelled analogue waves and ionized streams and rear-screen chemical reactions throwing off phosphenes in grids of dots not much more lifelike than Seurat’s own impressionistic “statements” on perceptual illusion. Good lord and (6) the dots are coming out of our *furniture*, all we’re spying on is our own *furniture*; and our very own chairs and lamps and bookspines sit visible but unseen at our gaze’s frame as we contemplate “Korea” or are “taken live to Amman Jordan,” or regard the plusher chairs and classier spines of the Huxtable “home” as illusory cues that this is some domestic interior whose membrane we have, slyly, unnoticed, violated. (7) and (8) and illusions *ad inf*. Not that realities about actors and phosphenes and furniture are unknown to us. We simply choose to ignore them. For six hours a day. They are part of the belief we suspend” (Foster-Wallace 1993, 153)

I quote this passage of criticism at length because it begins to approach how I think we should start to think about popular geopolitics, culture and technology through the mobilising of assemblages which I will go on to discuss in the next chapter. It

articulates, in a nutshell, some of the key post-humanist views on the withdrawn presence of objects. For Heidegger, for example, the suspension of belief in phosphenes, character acting and scripted programming are significant precisely due to their withdrawal and reappearance in relation to certain emergent “worlds” in which we find ourselves always inhabiting. Prior to this, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl would have dictated that *because* the phosphenes (and perhaps even the characters) were not directly accessible, it would be a mistake to think of them as relevant to experience itself; i.e. not only do we suspend belief in our voyeurism, this voyeurism is in fact the only reality to which we can have access. It is telling that in order to find literature that speaks to and illustrates these concerns, we must turn to writers of fiction such as Kafka, McCarthy and Foster-Wallace, further highlighting the imaginative, aesthetic dimensions of relational thinking, which often lends itself (not without risks) to an unfolding and rapid metastasising of seemingly simple objects and concepts into vast, sometimes impossibly vast fields.

## **2.4 Conclusions/Looking forward**

What the previous sections have pointed to is a way forward in how we might conceive of linking a diverse but interrelated set of literatures on the relationship(s) between journalism, geopolitical representation, travel writing and media technologies. The last section particularly looks to introduce the theoretical framework which is to follow in the next chapter suggesting that there are, within recent developments in philosophy of social science and humanities, existing modes of thought which have not yet, but could be brought to bear on the literatures discussed above. As stated in the introduction, it is the aim of this thesis to do just this. By way of a conclusion to this review, I will illustrate how some of these ideas have been deployed thus far in a what has become a nascent political geography/geopolitics of objects and the role of assemblage and actor network theories in the study of geopolitics in general. Dittmer (2013) has suggested that the value of approaches including assemblage and complexity to the geopolitical lies in their ability to cope with both non-linear outcomes and emergent instabilities. Sudden state disintegration or conflict proliferation is constantly outstripping the

capacity of existing models and theories seeking to predict or explain these phenomena. Valuable too, are the capacities of assemblage theory to work at multiple scales simultaneously to describe the emergence of political subjectivities at various scales and temporalities (riots, protest groups, parties, nations). Where I agree with Dittmer is in his call for the ethos of assemblage to provoke a new kind of historical or historiographic analysis “a return to the archive with new objects of study and new interpretive resources...recalling that each assemblage has its own particular historical trajectory, with regard to both its own composition and emergence and its interactions with other assemblages” (Dittmer 2013, 12). Adopting a more ecological track, Cudworth & Hobden argue for a “post-human” view of international politics, suggesting that complexity theory, far from being volatile abstractions are, in fact, ideal for grappling with what they regard as the complex system dynamics of international relations, which now can be seen to contradict the “human-centrism and linearity” (2011, 9) assumed by previous theoretical and methodological positions. What this means for the narrower sub-field of popular geopolitics/popular culture and world politics, is that these views of complexity and the approaches they entail necessitate an adaption of these theories to the particularities of a primarily textual field. As discussed in the introduction, this requires the hybridisation of these positions and existing textual/discursive theories, which will be the focus of the next chapter.





## Chapter 3

# Assemblage, Actor Networks and Object Oriented Ontologies: Towards a theoretical hybrid.

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter will move on from the themes identified in the introduction and literature review to how these can work to create a theoretical framework able to supplement discursive analytic readings of text in popular geopolitics, through the adoption of variations on relational ontology. Key concepts and thinkers from these traditions are placed into dialogue with each other in order to condition a vocabulary to apply to the empirical body of the thesis. To this end, the chapter will offer a view on the linked trajectories of assemblage, (OOO) and (ANT) as related schema, and then to how these may be enable the material understanding of how media technologies and texts operate together in the construction of popular geopolitics. As a consequence, this chapter will attempt to do somewhat more than list a series of theoretical propositions or ideas, in that it will argue for the utility of using these concepts and ontologies as a method for analysing popular geopolitics; a position which is in its infancy in the literature and, it is hoped, to which this thesis adds more extensive support. The chapter looks not only to create a theoretical framework around which the archival strands of the thesis might be read but also to offer a contribution to the theoretical literature itself, through an identification of the modes of theorising in ANT, assemblage and OOO which are most applicable to the analysis of world politics and popular culture, how these three strands of theory came about, relate and speak to each other.

The central aim is not to abandon or reject textual critique which has hitherto characterised critical geopolitical analysis of the media, but rather to demonstrate how through attention to different ontological forms, different ways of imagining radio

otherwise and different kinds of source material, we can gain a greater understanding of *how* the text objects *constructing worlds* are made *possible* by a multiplicity of other objects which exist equally and in relation to these texts. Muller (2008, 325) argues that this approach to texts and discourse in critical geopolitics “emphasises the autonomy of the acting individual. Individuals shape discourses, draw on them intentionally, and deploy them strategically to pursue certain ends”. I intend to argue here that through the augmentation of discourse theories using strands of assemblage, ANT and OOO, the textual-material geopolitics of media as illustrated through individuals, serials and infrastructures of radio news can be read (and written) in a more productive light, particularly in relation to postcolonial critiques and theories, which remain vital to the understanding popular geopolitics.

Recent theoretical innovations such as those engaged by this thesis have, across the humanities, been broadly conceived under the banner of post-humanism/new materialism<sup>4</sup>, around a desire to de-centre the narrow readings of the human subject, human subjective experience or human-thought/thought-human correlates from the world at large (Meisalloux 2009; Barad 2007). This takes the assumption that the world continues absent and indifferent to the presence, perception, attitude or orientation of a human subject to it and, through so doing, variously elevates and animates the “more-than” or “para” textual/linguistic/discursive elements of social phenomena. To this end I am interested in how we might extract from these theories, an account of how the broadcast texts, individuals and infrastructures implicated in popular geopolitics might come to be constituted and moreover, to seek cues as to how we might write about the non-human components of these assemblages. It is because of this non-paradigmatic approach, then, my particular account of how these theoretical frames come to inform this research adapts, rather than adopts wholesale, some of the ontological commitments of these theories.

The genealogy of these various frames I am seeking to use is broadly located in material semiotics, albeit scaled utilising theories of social assemblage. The focus of the thesis: the demonstration of the radio as a networked assemblage of popular geopolitics widely distributed, yet connected in time and scale, necessitates the use of non-systematic theoretical tools which adopt degree of intellectual humility in their

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<sup>4</sup> Which I use interchangeably, with a recognition that there are distinctions between these theoretical classifications, but ones which are beyond the scope of this thesis.

application to the world, whilst at the same time “(D)escribe(s) the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors including objects, subjects, human beings, machines, animals, “nature,” ideas, organizations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements”(Law 2009, 141). In addition to this, I also concur with Law that whilst the term “theory” is deployed throughout, it should not be thought of in terms of positivist verification (theory as an explanation of “why” in terms of cause-effect relationships), nor absolutely within a post-positivist frame of theory as addressing “how” a given state of affairs *becomes possible*. Instead, the purpose of these theories for research has been to engage in descriptions which “afford equal value to the plural forces of human bodies, material objects, affective registers, infrastructures and atmospheres” (Lisle 2013, 73), and to extract from a small group of related thinkers and theories, the basis for a materialist-discursive reading of radio broadcasting in world politics.

The chapter will continue with a discussion of the origins of assemblage, Actor Network Theory and OOO presented in the introduction, conceived here as interlinked images of a similar ontology, along with some of their discontinuities and frictions, in order to sketch a conceptual framework in which this triad can be made to work together, particularly in relation to the theories of the postcolonial which are both vital to the discourse analytic paradigm in popular geopolitics and, relatedly, to the empirical material of the radio archive I present in the following chapters. The hybrid theory is then mobilised towards the end of the chapter to illustrate its utility to some of the main themes of the thesis. The reason for this focus is that the empirical focus of the thesis will revolve, in certain parts, around how we conceive of the components of assemblages/networks and consequently it is necessary to define, early on, precisely how we are thinking this term and, following this, the recent interpolations of assemblage, specifically by Manuel DeLanda, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett, alongside certain strands of OOO as they relate to the idea of text. This is undertaken in order to lay the ground for the next chapter on methodology by demonstrating how these ideas might be mobilised in an understanding of the written text, as this is the object of analysis around which the empirical chapters of the thesis will revolve. The point of this is to see how these theories might be applied to the study of popular geopolitics in a manner which

supplements, rather than supplants “traditional” theoretical and methodological tools such as discourse analysis. It is this novel way of approaching text; through the lens of assemblage/ANT/OOO which will contribute not only to methodological and theoretical debates in critical geopolitics and popular culture but also to cultural studies more generally.

The reason for a “supplementing” rather than a “supplanting” here, is that, firstly, the theoretical triad described above is not a unified position, being shaped (as we shall see) by thinkers whose positions and origins vary so greatly as to make the idea that we could simply “kick out” existing discursive critiques of geopolitical representation and replace them wholesale impossible; secondly, and relatedly, that in philosophy of social science and the humanities generally, a gradualist approach which emphasises the benefits of new modes of thinking and analysis is, to make a normative point, more productive than claims to overthrow or to conceptual revolution: to approach an existing theoretical edifice with a blueprint usually (although not always) seems far better than to do so with a bulldozer. Finally, it also seems counter-intuitive to attempt to write about the field of popular culture and world politics if one seeks to evacuate that field of either human beings (who are part of cultural production) or the discursive power of the things they produce (which have an effect on the world). It is for these reasons that the framework to follow is intentionally drawn as an experiment, to learn what this sub-field and its commonly taken objects of analysis *might look like*, were we to adopt certain central elements of the three theoretical positions outlined above and in the rest of the chapter.

### **3.1 Building blocks: Assemblage as Organisational Cartography**

Assemblage thinking/thinking assemblage augments the study of discourses of critical geopolitics, specifically the multiple, intersecting *worlds* within this concept covered in the literature review (cultural, material, elite, popular). It does this through the adoption of an ontological position which gives due and equal attention to be given to multiplicities of actors implicated within these worlds in order to “account for the mobilization, organization and operation of various assemblages composed of bodies, machines, raw matter, ideas, discourses, affects etc...” (Bousquet 2014, 95). This kind of thinking, which has recently been adopted in geography perhaps more

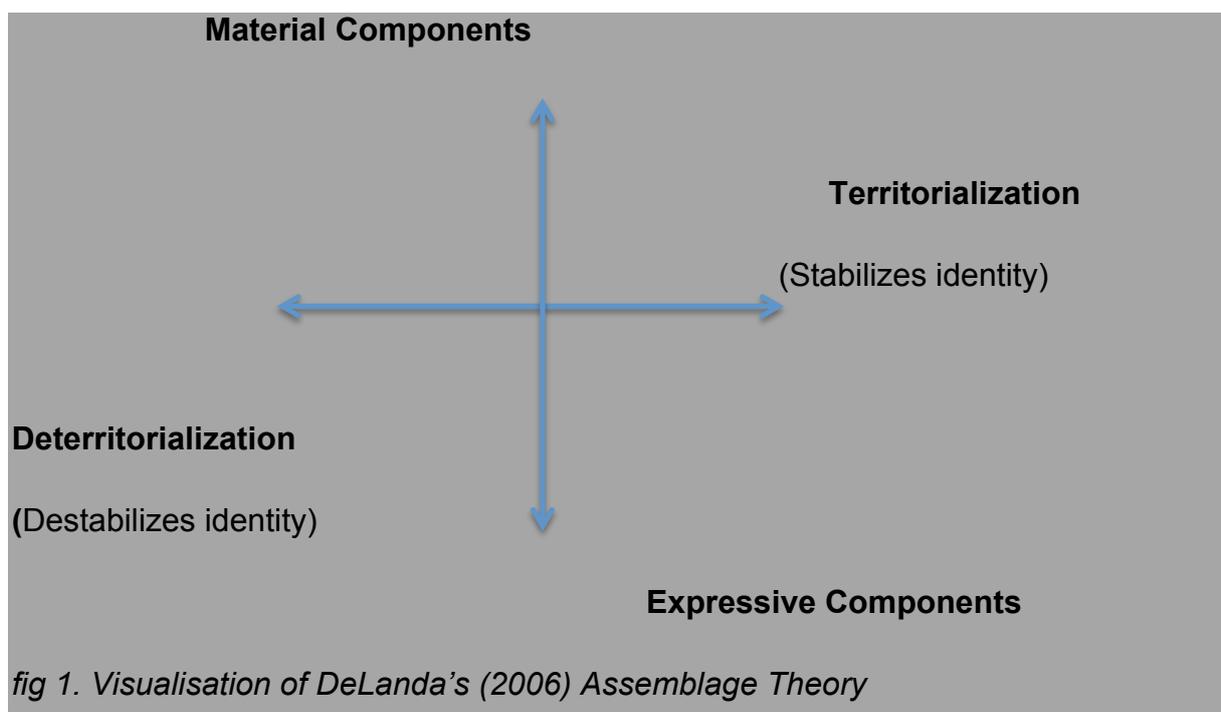
than most other disciplines largely due to the re-orientation of ideas of space, scale and distance at its heart, understands that “Assemblage names an uneven topography of trajectories that cross or engage each other to different extents over time, and that themselves exceed the assemblage...an orientation to assembling and disassembling, as relations form, take hold and endure, but also may change or be disrupted.”” (Bennett 2005, qtd in Anderson & Mcfarlane 2011, 125) The benefits of this have been well highlighted in empirical studies, for example, of political decision making, offering “(A)n enhanced understanding of decisions: from uncovering connections between entities and the assemblages to which they belong, to a concern with the power of materialities as well as of discursivities or expressivities, to produce contested ‘regimes of truth’ and the affects they generate” (Hillier 2009, 644). I propose that such an orientation can be brought to bear on the analysis of popular geopolitical texts which enables us to engage the various texts, objects, individuals, affects and discursive formations of which they are composed. This allows us to address these multiple social-material phenomena (in this case radio technology, journalism and geopolitics) in a manner that does not reduce any of them to the workings of the other. This is to say that whilst the text is still an important referential object, constructing and reinforcing identities, positions and representations of place, the technologies (material and linguistic) that diffuse or broadcast these components are equally important, and cannot be reduced to simple vehicles for this.

Critical Geopolitics has, to some extent engaged these ideas in the past; its origins are, after all, in the problematisation of assumptions about how the geopolitical becomes represented in and through dominant, hegemonic discourses (O’Tuathail 1996). This paradigm is now so well established, though, that it often stands accused of a fixation on these ordering principles, at the expense of a more dynamic and inclusive ontology which recognises the complexities under which individuals, groups, objects and materials interact at multiple scales simultaneously. Such a view is particularly relevant to the study of world politics as a consequence of the multitude of actors engaged in any one political process at a given time. Also, on the point of the role of language and discourse, assemblage theories do not marginalise but instead open out the implications of discursive formations, giving depth to their material dimensions. Discourse analyses have never denied a material component

to language, but have too often shied away from accepting an ultimate, material “real” which language pertains to, or which cannot be reduced to the discursive constructions of language (in its most extreme formations). It is with this that I take issue, and propose the adoption of a theory of assemblage in relation to text taking seriously this material realm, beginning as it does from an absolute and non-negotiable realism; or that however socially constructed the world may appear, there is still a real material world which exists (DeLanda, 2006). Despite this, though, assemblage should not be thought of as something as solid as, say, a structure, given that “(A)ssemblages are in constant variation, are themselves constantly subject to transformations...Anybody can shout, “I declare a general mobilization,” but in the absence of an effectuated variable giving that person the right to make such a statement it is an act of puerility or insanity, not an act of enunciation”(Deleuze & Guattari 1988, 91).

The nature of “effectuated variables” is central to DeLanda’s later adoption (and adaptation) of assemblage, and how this can be extended to *all entities*: social, political, cultural; human and non-human. So for my purposes here, I hold that assemblage is first found as a mode of thinking about the extra-representational aspects of language (in Deleuze and Guattari), and then expanded to a generalised mode of ontological thinking (and doing) for *all social entities* in DeLanda. What this means in practice is outlined in DeLanda’s (2006) theory of social assemblage, and leads him to the construction of a fourfold ontology of things in *fig. 1* below. Every assemblage is defined along two axes, with the vertical defining “the variable roles which an assemblage’s components may play, from a purely *material* role at one extreme, to a purely *expressive* role at the other.” (DeLanda 2006, 11). It should be noted that components material and expressive roles exist in tandem and exercise different sets of capacities. On the other axes, utilising the more familiar Deleuzo-Guattarian cartography of territorialisation/deterritorialization, components in assemblage may move towards one or other end of this scale based on the manner in which they increase or decrease, stabilize or destabilize its internal homogeneity and identity. Further to this, the relations of exteriority proposed by DeLanda “are not the result of an aggregation of the components’ own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities”, such that “assemblages may be taken apart while at the same time allowing that the interactions between parts may result in a true

synthesis”(Ibid). Once again, actualizing this to the context of this research, the identity of a state broadcaster such as the BBC might be stabilized by the territorialization of expressive components such as the renewal of its charter or maintenance of a licence fee, or conversely, destabilized through a reduction in its funding or requirement that it begin to carry advertising and, at the same time, may also be stabilized by the territorialization of material components such as new technological infrastructures or capacities, equipment and staffing levels. DeLanda’s axes are, indeed, drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s, where



“The sequenced or conjugated degrees of deterritorialization, and the operations of reterritorialization stabilize the aggregate at a given moment” (1988, 98) alongside a vertical axis of the material and expressive roles played by components of an assemblage, another continuum, rather than a binary. DeLanda’s “Assemblage 2.0”, thus places Deleuze & Guattari’s ontology within a system of social metaphysics, applicable to *any entity* at *any scale*. DeLanda utilises a large “cast” of examples as to how this model of assemblage works in the real world, arguing that concrete social

assemblages such as organizations, cities or markets contain material components such as human bodies, but also structures such as buildings, walls or communications infrastructures, *and* expressive components such as conversations, affects, commands or conventions. The forces of territorialization and deterritorialization acting upon these components would effect changes to these components as in, for example, a networked transit system introduced to a city or new forms of communication inculcated by changing technologies but also more prosaic practices such as the routinization of clock time or the standardisation of codes of weights and measures, currency or linguistic expression (DeLanda, 2008).

Relating this to assemblages of popular geopolitics, we can see that through the nature of relations of exteriority, “The BBC” can afford the loss (and replacement) of correspondents without fundamentally altering its identity as a broadcaster (to a point). However were it to lose power to a transmitter or relay station, its identity would be altered, as it would cease to “exist” within a given spatial area or become received simply as static. This gives some indication of the difference between material and expressive roles played by various components. These components and systems may be individually or collectively material, social or conceptual and their workings and operations frequently invisible/withdrawn.

In the archival domains of popular culture and world politics that the later parts of this thesis will be concerned with, this means in practice that, for example, “The bureaucratic document can through its *materiality* be circulated to distant places and as such can organize a political process, but it also implies certain symbolic codes and practical understandings reaching from what is important and requires to be documented and requires to be documented to how it has to be filled out appropriately” (Bueger 2013, 62). Consequently the document’s materiality-in-circulation is given equal regard to its semantic content. Similarly, technologies themselves do not supersede the texts they transmit as objects of analysis: the medium is *not* the message, or at least not in the way, for example, Marshall McLuhan totalises this statement. Assemblage thinking, as I propose to use it here, enlivens formerly inert components of networks and opens up the possibility for discussing agency in popular geopolitics *across* humans, texts and technologies. Consequently I hold assemblage theories as broadly in line with although not identical to the Actor Network sociology of Bruno Latour. Latour argues that three

resources have traditionally been employed to deal with agencies; the attribution of naturality; the attribution of sociality; the attribution of semiotic construction. ANT and Science Technology and Society (STS) emerges from the impossibility of differentiating these categories, or assigning agencies independently within them, as a consequence of a belief in a more general, metaphysical inseparability of the domains of nature and culture (Latour 1993). Calling for a new vocabulary to deal with this new situation, Latour states that

“ANT claims that modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, topy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structure, systems. It aims at explaining the effects accounted for by those traditional words without having to by the ontology, topology and politics that goes with them.”(Latour, 1990b; 3)

What I believe this also implies, it is important to state, is that “societies” here does not simply mean “human” societies, or even societies where humans are the most numerous actors (although of course it can). Pursuing what would seem to some Latour scholars as a sacrilegious move, I want to associate the reading of Latour I propose to engage as located in certain elements of Heidegger’s tool analysis. The reason for this being, simply, that they both problematize distance (and consequently technologies which perturb distance) when read together. The obvious connection between Latour’s actor-network theory and assemblage theory is largely grounded in the central role granted to the role of relationality between ontologically equal actors existing at different scales, effectuated by virtue of the strength of their relations. Given the commitment of this thesis to adapting these theoretical frameworks to existing modes of reading popular geopolitics, however, I want to set out in the next section how postcolonial theories can be read alongside the Latourian/DeLanda ontologies discussed above. The importance of this is twofold: firstly, it will demonstrate how these broadly materialist analyses might sit alongside a predominantly discursive paradigm whilst at the same time pre-figuring the thesis’ later empirical engagement with archival material which are heavily indebted to theories of the postcolonial.

### 3.2 Discourse, Power and Postcoloniality in media assemblages

As I discussed in the introduction, the importance of post-colonialism for the development of critical geopolitical critiques of media texts cannot be overstated. The work of Edward Said (1979), Homni Bahaba (2013) and Franz Fanon (1959) deeply informing the later work of scholars of popular geopolitics. Foreign news as a particular genre of writing emerging during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries as a mode of bringing the colonised Other under various representational regimes. For Said this involved the ways in which the politics of domination during the colonial era were not simply conducted through systematic economic imbalances and the threat of military force, but also through parallel establishment of essentialised cultural imaginaries which cited and situated the colonised as belonging to an entirely separate political and social order. The sedimentation of this practice of Othering was, Said argued, conducted across genres of literature, art, poetry and travel narratives from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.

Given this, it is clear how the work of popular geopolitics takes as its starting point the ways in which these practices continue to emerge in contemporary popular culture. Some of this work has pointed to the manner in which the construction and sedimentation of Otherness or subalterneity argued for in postcolonial theories is achieved, in part, through these representational acts of scripting in foreign news, which is particularly relevant for our concern here with the BBC and its material-discursive apparatus. This is, in part, why critical discourse analyses have provided powerful iterations of how these relations of domination persist in the often apparently “neutral” representational fields of news reporting. These acts of scripting are, however, also material practices as well, in the sense that they require a physical manifestation of broadcast capacities in order to do this, but also *bring about* states of affairs, imaginaries etc. David Slater, for example points to the fact that “The coloniality and imperialism of power are rooted in the will and capacity to

invade and penetrate – the imperial, as contrasted to the colonial, not necessarily requiring the possession of territory.”(p.26)

What this means here is that the manifestations of the colonial/post-colonial are made visible/audible at different *sites* within the radio assemblage (in the physical existence of the transmitters, built on islands as liminal and defensible spaces designed to broadcast for “maximum penetration of target area”); a value of scripting through repetition and authority (through the structure of *FootC* as BBC program: its representations carry weight through their situation within a broadcast ecology; the materiality of radio as crystallised at multiple space-times, but, as the BBC and Diplomatic Wireless Service were fundamentally still a part of the British Empire during the 1950’s and 60’s, even as it was disintegrating, the colonial project cannot be disentangled from the radio assemblage and hence any actor-networking of this space/spaces must take account of this. Colonialism is a totalising practice which operates materially at the same time that it operated discursively. Similarly, anti-colonial resistance during the 1950’s and 60’s as Fanon lyrically illustrates, was simultaneously conducted in both symbolic and material registers, with the FLN’s lived practices of resistance to colonial rule augmented by the signal of *The Voice of Fighting Algeria* embedded within these practices. This goes further to making the argument of Actor-network and assemblage theories that it is counter-productive to shape our analyses in a way that reduces one to the other.

We can see various “colonialisms” as assemblages in their own right under the ontological mapping discussed above. Colonial projects and governance systems have always been complex systems of symbolic *and* material regimes, regulations, objects and knowledges designed to control and produced bodies, sites and spaces (Legg 2009). Similarly, the progressive destabilization of these assemblages as a consequence of (for example) anti-colonial resistance movements, reveals the intellectual currents around self determination, material costs of the maintenance of empire or the physical disruption of the economic circuits of imperialism through conflict as all having an effect on the identity of these imperial assemblages.

As I see it here, and will discuss in the following chapters, colonialism exists as both a material and expressive force acting on the radio assemblage, and manifested

through various physical and textual sites, the remnants of which form the basis for some of the empirical material which is to follow. Colonialism emerges in the physical infrastructure of the BBC's external broadcasting network as equally as the logic(s) of imperialism which essentialise the identities of the colonised dictate the ongoing need for these broadcast infrastructures to be built, maintained and kept transmitting. A failure to do so may, under this rubric, leave these populations "vulnerable" to targeting by either anti-imperialist or Communist propaganda. Similarly, the imbibed colonial attitudes sedimented in the worldviews of journalists and travel writers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries have been highlighted in studies of postcolonial literature, illustrating how the descriptions of, for example, landscape or identity found within these discourses produced and essentialised imaginaries of difference between the coloniser and the colonised. What a more thoroughgoing account of the materialities at work around these representational practices can do is to identify where these colonial tropes re-appear in the foreign news components of the radio assemblage as a way of re-emphasising the importance for popular geopolitics of the scripting of foreign news, albeit within a more holistic view of the supporting infrastructures by and through which these texts gain material and discursive power through broadcast and amplification. To think in this way is to realise that colonialism was a force which was constituted by multiple forces and objects, some of which were the result of human, discursive and ideological agency but others which were not.

Discourse analytics also retain their utility within the theoretical frameworks discussed here for the ways in which their identification of how and where power can still be identified within the material circuitry of the radio assemblage. This will become relevant in Chapter 7 where the subjectivity of the individual radio correspondent is read through the material-discursive lens of assemblage, emerging as a component upon which certain material and physical forces act and react, but also as a gendered subject located within a socio-cultural milieu in which this gendered subjectivity both materially and symbolically amplified certain points of journalistic discourse whilst marginalising or silencing others. The gendering of travel and journalistic writing even *within* the context of post-colonial studies have also been continually returned to by both Mary Louise Pratt, Spurr, Said and many other post-colonial critics. In addition to this, contemporary social and gender

theorists influenced these critiques argue for the enduring presence of gendered constructions of distant spaces and others in (neo) colonial contexts (Butler, 2007; Puar 2007).

Perhaps though, the most persuasive argument for retaining the insights of discourse analysis through the post-colonial within a new-materialist hybrid framework has been alluded to in the introduction, and concerns the apparent limitations of some of new-materialist frameworks to provide an adequate account of historicity. Or to put it another way, to account for how and why the material vitality of a given assemblage emerges in the way it does. For Latour and variants of ANT, the associations or connections between entities emerge as the deciding factors binding together complex entities (whether these are experiments, laboratories or scientific paradigms); DeLanda, similarly, holds to the strength of forces of territorialisation and deterritorialization to stabilize and destabilize the components of the assemblage.

### **3.3 From theory to practice: DeLanda, Latour and objects in material-textual assemblage: Radio News**

As I have discussed above, the similarities between DeLanda and the Actor Network Sociology of Bruno Latour have been pointed to at the level of metaphysics but require further translation in respects to how they incorporate the textual and the material simultaneously. Latour, it is argued, conceives himself as operating largely within the field of metaphysics, particularly in his later work. Given the points I have made about relationality in the previous section, I do not wish to engage in a (too) lengthy re-calibration of Latour's metaphysics as against DeLanda's, as this will not have great bearing on the manner in which I intend to use them here. Rather I want to focus on how certain analytical motifs Latour deploys in his early work on science studies can be read through and in DeLanda's assemblage theory and, this established, how such a hybrid theory might be applied to the radio-journalistic assemblage this thesis seeks to map. Latour's ontology is deceptively simple: nothing is inherently reducible or irreducible to anything else: the work of reduction or

irreduction to larger or smaller forms requires us to “show the working”, to demonstrate the *alliances* formed between actors of every size, in order to demonstrate how their coming into metaphysical and social being affects things around them. What this means in practice, metaphysically, is important for going beyond the linguistic turn in studies of popular culture in world politics, because it implies that:

“Intellectual connections are not inherently stronger or weaker than physical ones; all connections require the same type of labour, and only after the work is done can we say, retroactively, that we knew all along that the connection had to hold...An actor by itself is always weak, while strength comes from *allies*.”(Harman 2007, 26)

So the discursive strength gained by a particular pattern of representations about, for example, national identity is not any stronger than, or reducible to, a whole series of other connections within which these representations are produced, many of which may have nothing to do with discursive representation or semiotics, for example. Harman identifies Leibniz as one of the first philosophers to deploy the notion of the “pseudo-substance” or “aggregate” and is consequently the progenitor of the assemblage, through his description of the Dutch East India Company “A massive corporation (that) became real by carefully assembling an entire multitude of actors by painstaking labour. For Latour, this corporation is no different in kind from a carbon atom or a Broadway show tune” (Harman, 2007: 27). In Leibniz this is understood as “An aggregate is nothing other than all those things from which it results taken at the same time, which really have their unity only from a mind, on account of those things which they have in common, like a flock of sheep”(Leibniz, qtd in Lodge, 2001: 470). Where assemblage theory goes further is in its ability to scale aggregates along various axes of identity, by which they become more or less aggregated based on a series of characteristics (as discussed above), and whilst I defend a cautious version of Harman’s position against the totality of relationism, it is in order to “democratize relation and turn all objects into media, through which the forces of other objects vibrate” (Harman, Ibid: 29). This, broadly, sits with the first part of the position in relational geographies which argues that “objects *are* space,

space *is* objects...” but not the second, “...and moreover objects can *only be understood* in relation to other objects” (Jones, 2009: 492, emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

The basic point of ontological difference between Latour and DeLanda revolves around the amount of metaphysical work (particularly temporal) which a given assemblage or actor can “take” before it is changed.<sup>6</sup> This might be termed a “threshold”, with Latour’s falling almost instantaneously (actors are always changed by coming into contact with other actors/actants: something which they are constantly doing)<sup>7</sup> where DeLanda, on the other hand, holds that the relations of exteriority holding a given assemblage together can bear a certain degree of loss/gain in its components without fundamentally altering it (although crucially without reverting to the idea of the assemblage being characterised by *essence*). This is commonly known as “redundant causation”. It should be remembered here that assemblage must be thought of as *both* noun and *verb*, as both a grouping and a process, and this is another element of DeLanda’s assemblage overlapping with Latour’s topography of actants-in-process.

To think of a general example, we might consider various geopolitical assemblages at various scales which could be understood in this way: the Soviet Union could have potentially survived the departure of a certain number of its constituent states and retained its identity, but as it disintegrates it leaves only the assemblage “Russia” in its place, having been derritorialized both materially (in terms of its physical, territorial constituent parts) and expressively (through the discursive, diplomatic and linguistic loss of meaning contained in the term “The Soviet Union”). This is, of course, a necessarily simplified example but demonstrates how assemblage theory in its most broad constituents can be put to work in new readings of material geopolitics. We might also think of geopolitical assemblages at different scales: a ballistic missile, for example, is implicated, through its relations, in a variety of geopolitical assemblages (states, conflicts, treaties), but is also an assemblage in its own right; a missile contains thousands of sub-personal components which work to act upon its stability or instability as a viable assemblage (removal of the gyroscopic

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<sup>5</sup> As Harman regards objects as ultimately “cut-off from all relations, partly hidden away in private vacuums” (2002). This is a metaphysical position which has some poetic and aesthetic value, but must remain a question for philosophy, rather than cultural geography.

<sup>6</sup> This is hardly a novel problem for metaphysics: Theseus ship, and numerous variations thereof have perpetually provided the grounding for problems of identity over time for philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> This is where Whitehead’s influence on Latour is most pronounced

components acting as its guidance system and it becomes dangerously deterritorialized; remove the plutonium warhead and it becomes a museum object or spare parts). Where DeLanda's ontology constructs every entity along the fourfold axis, it creates assemblages purely in the abstract. Latour, on the other hand, or rather Latour's ontology, whilst it revolves around the simple notion of all-things-as-actors, creates a number of specific motifs corresponding more-or-less to *actually existing systems*, what in linguistic terms we might call *operators*; neither sub-categories of actors and objects, nor super-structures by which to define them.

For popular geopolitics, the production of knowledge about distant places, through such practices as cartography are inherently problematic as a practice involving a world created from and for a particular perspective; it is, like any perspectival system of knowledge, always created *by* and *for* someone/somebody/something (Cox, 1981). These are also tied historiographically to the construction and maintenance of imperial projects of domination. However, the mainstream view since the emergence of metageographies of cartography often gives too simplistic an account the way in which space became subject to these practices. For Latour,

“Cartography is one network cumulating traces in a few centres which by themselves are as local as each of the points Laperouse, Cook or Magellen cross; the only difference is in the slow construction of a map inside these centres, a map that defines two-way movement to and from the periphery. In other words, we do not have to oppose the local knowledge of the Chinese to the universal knowledge of the European, but only two local knowledges, one of them having the shape of a network transporting back and forth immutable mobiles to act at a distance” (Latour 1987, 229)

Latour's point is that cartography is *already* a practice that contains multiple spaces and times nested within each other<sup>9</sup>, even before it begins its imperial inscriptions on supposedly “blank space”. This poses a problem for certain strands of critical geopolitics because it brings into question the meta-geographical narrative that discourses of exploration and cartography involved, simply, an occularcentric, dominating gaze that conquered, through mapping, whatever crossed its path (O'Tuathail 1996, 15). Latour's argument is that such cartographies did not and could not escape the inflection/infection of existing knowledges on which they were based. Also, though, he crucially argues that these interactions (abstractions as he

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<sup>9</sup> both actual and virtual

puts it) are not simply a function of the human mind, but occur between any two objects whatsoever (Harman 2009, 55).

Given the focus I will employ in this thesis on the various assemblages of by BBC foreign news, the *newsroom* as both component and assemblage is a key to understanding this. Just as, for example, the Royal Geographical Society can be read as a centre of calculation for various taxonomical, topographical, anthropological or other broadly epistemic duties (Driver 2001), we can see the BBC as a corollary with regards to geopolitical information/news. Socially, the news is regarded as fulfilling the function of the creation and maintenance of a public sphere, in which citizens can be actively informed about the world around them (Habermas, 1989). At an abstract level though, it attempts to subvert idealism: this is to say it offers a system of confirmation for that which has not been directly observed being able to stand in large scale truth claims on the basis of observation by individuals. I cannot empirically observe a coup in Ukraine, but on the basis of others claims about it, I am aware that *something* has happened.

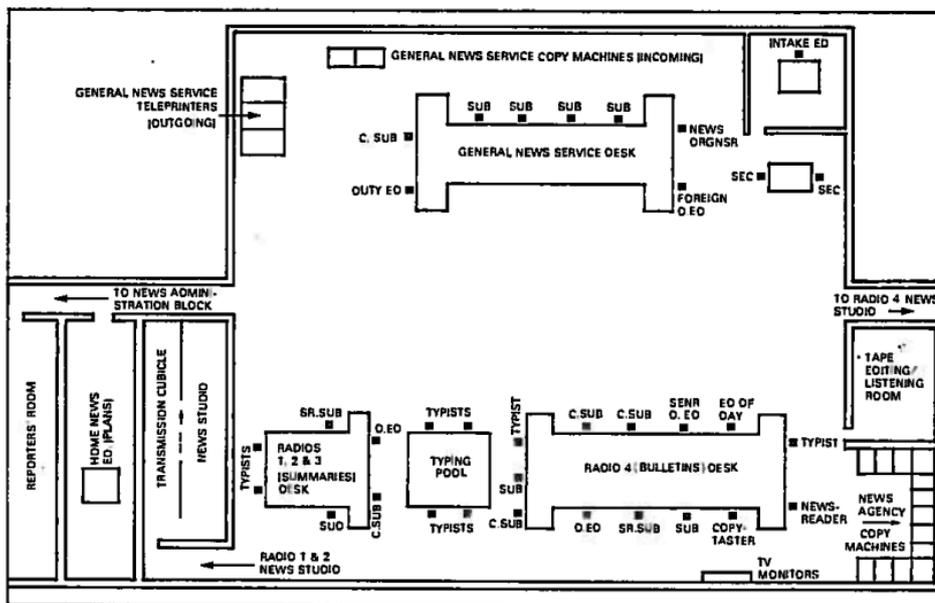


Figure 3.1: *The Radio Newsroom*

Fig 2. Diagram of the Radio Newsroom, (Schlesinger 1978, 37)

Fig. 2 above is taken from Phillip Schlesinger's *Putting Reality Together*, written in 1976, which remains one of the few comprehensive sociological accounts of the production of broadcast news to date. Schlesinger's research involved access to BBC news staff and offices and took case studies into editorial control and corporate ideology. I include Schlesinger's diagram and allude to his work here not in order to engage with its sociological or aesthetic merits but because it provides a starting point for the Latourian network analysis/assemblage hybrid I am trying to work towards as a framework. The newsroom in the figure can clearly be read as a *centre of calculation*, something Latour delineates as vital to the production and maintenance of knowledge and action-at-a-distance. However, as we move along the chains of associations, the identities of the objects, components and other actors becomes muddled. The "General news service copy machines incoming", for example, act as conduits for information entering this particular network, but so, to a lesser extent, does the television screen across the other side of the room. In Latourian language, we might say that the copy machines/intake editor *association* has greater power than any set of *associations* established between the television screen and anyone happening to be watching it. The very title of the work *Putting Reality Together* speaks of the manner in which journalism is seen *prime facie* as a question of epistemology (how do *we know* that it is/was), subsuming questions of ontology (what *is*). Furthermore, the figurative and spatial *gap* between the news service desk (raw material) and the "Radio 4 Bulletins desk" (produced reality) is crossed or bridged by a further set of associations. Not only this but the different valences of inscription machines present at any time, and in which combination provides a wide range of possibilities: sub-editor/filed despatch typist/typewriter desk-editor/phone; this is to say nothing of other actants hovering in the wings – either actually or virtually – such as political/financial pressures, professional rivalries or technical limitations. The inscription machines and centres of calculation involved in the production of modern news are, though, also dependent on language, or rather *languages* which were themselves emergent historical systems working to create or displace standard languages and thus "universal schooling, colonialism, and early mass media, while extending the reach of the standard, also brought it into contact with other languages, codes, or registers, ensuring that it would be reinjected with heterogeneous elements and set into variation again."(DeLanda 2008, 247).

As I outlined in the literature review however, critical discourse analysis has provided the frame or modality of analysis for much research which has gone before in popular geopolitics, travel writing, journalism and media. The central tenet of this being that language constructs the world, and it is the job of the researcher to uncover, identify and expose the power dynamics and relations of domination which underwrite these constructions. The hybrid theory I am proposing here does not dispute the centrality of language to the production of reality, but rather emphasises multiplicities; of languages, grammars, materials and mediators which are *not* simply phantoms, social constructions or mirages but are grounded in *real, actually existing* objects. That the components of a radio assemblage may have been designed and produced with the participation of certain human actors (agents-producing-discourses) clearly does not mean then, that they are the *only* or even the most significant actors/agents within this particular assemblage. Enlivening objects cannot involve their total separation from spheres of human *being*, in the manner of an anti-Berkeleyan pan-psychism which grants consciousness to objects. Whilst I do argue, alongside Bennett, that to think assemblage is to think agency as distributed; to move “Beyond human bodies and intersubjective fields of vital materials and the human-nonhuman assemblages they form” (Bennett 2010, 30), to reject or play down the role of human actors in processes of media and cultural production is as unnecessary as it is impossible.

Latour, again in relation to the construction of scientific knowledge suggests that “A document becomes scientific when its claims stop being isolated and when the number of people engaged in publishing it are many and explicitly indicated in the text” (1987, 33); is this not precisely what happens in the newsroom and in the production of news texts? Once again, it is the purpose of this thesis, in part, to extract the most viable concepts and tools from assemblage and object-oriented accounts of the world and apply them to the study of popular geopolitics. It is in this sense once again, to reiterate my statement at the beginning of this chapter, that I retreat, or at least do not adopt wholesale new materialism’s rejection of the linguistic and the textual, and from some of OOO’s rejection of the human. What I am interested in is a very specific adoption/adaption of some of the theoretical tools offered by these approaches to the sub-field of popular geopolitics, and how these

might act as both explanatory and aesthetic ordering principles for these tools in the service of reading popular cultural assemblages.

I want to move in the final section to a more specific development of these ideas towards popular geopolitics, or the inter-face between media texts, technologies, organisations and international politics and, more importantly, how the theoretical apparatus I have been discussing thus far can, in an adapted form, be employed to the archives on which the research for this project is conducted.

“Since no object contains another, all have a certain distance from one another; even a whole is distant from its own parts. But action also means nearness, since to act on something means to affect, touch, or interfere with it in some way. In other words, action at a distance means nothing less than ‘nearness at a distance’. And this is the central paradox not only of Latour’s philosophy, but of philosophy as a whole.”(Harman 2009, 34-5)

The aporia of Latour’s arguments around this history of science is provided by Andrew Barry, who points to the fact that: “The 19<sup>th</sup> Century involved a vast increase in efforts to observe and document wider social and natural environments...The typical scientific observer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was to be found as much outside as inside the artificial space of the laboratory” (Barry 1995, 42). Therefore, expanding Latour’s own logic, we can expand the notion of the “laboratory” employed in his discussions of the production of scientific consensus and controversy to a range of other spaces where actants, intermediaries and actors come into decisive contact with each other. Barry argues, via the sociologist Anthony Giddens that of all of the modes of space-time compression arrived at over the course of industrial modernity, communication should be considered separately from others. The description of the newsroom I engage above should be read in the context, although not as a 1:1 correlation between two of Latour’s other motifs: the inscription device, for Latour, is construed as a scientific apparatus *at any scale*, from a government agency to a string of radio telescopes; from a single lab technician and a microscope to a thermometer (43). Once again, these devices are extant to the relations they are implicated in the associations they make, the success of their striving.

“According to Latour, the inscriptions of European explorers and colonial agents also produced objects of analysis; in this case diverse peoples and places. In addition, these signs on paper – drawings, text, numbers and symbols of various kinds- travelled along networks that were superimposed over the material worlds of others and, eventually, were linked through various technologies to collection sites (archives). As such sites, the

inscriptions made legible to a planning and administering eye what was once far away and indistinct” (237)

I believe, though, that the interaction between inscription devices which, for Latour and Woolgar “comprise(s) a particular combination of machines, pieces of apparatus, and technicians”(2013, 58) in addition to points of agglomeration which made the construction of knowledge possible, are not limited to imperial taxonomies and cartography or scientific facts in laboratories. A media organisation is shot through with inscription devices: the reporter’s notebook or note-taking apparatus<sup>10</sup>; dictaphones, telephones, journalists, editors, conventions and guidelines, rumours, histories, local stringers (to name but a few). But this, too, is where the importing of DeLanda’s assemblage theory can help us understand how the media assemblage works at different scales. This is to say that the news program is *both* an inscription device *and* a centre of calculation, depending on which particular set of relations it happens to be implicated in at a given time. It is a centre of calculation when viewed as a snapshot of a given set of relations between the world and the other objects composing the media assemblage trying to construct it, but also an inscription device in a much wider assemblage of competing organisations, audiences, newspapers, broadcasts, journalists all seeking to develop the strongest set of associations possible; motivated, it should be stated, by a variety of material (profit, commercial prowess) and expressive (journalistic credibility, objectivity, reflection of personal or ownership bias or editorial line) forces acting upon the identity of the objects in the assemblage. This is the major strength of hybrid theory: it is able to account for entities at various scales, *without* micro or macro-reductionism. Not only this, but it is also able to do this at various historical moments, as temporal context is implicitly built in to the theoretical framework not as an over-determining force, but as one actant amongst many. The power relations underlying discursive analyses are, thus, refigured as not being “all there is” but one particular set of forces which act (or not) upon entities, giving back a role to material realities whose actions are no less real or influential.

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<sup>10</sup> Which, on more than one occasion has been called upon to participate in politico-legal assemblages as a piece of evidence. For example, during the Hutton inquiry into the death of the British weapons expert Dr. David Kelly, a large part of the investigation fell upon the validity of the inscriptions made by the journalist Andrew Gilligan into his PDA, surmising the notes taken during his interviews with Dr. Kelly. Here, then, the linguistic representations, but also the chain of associations within them demonstrate the importance of the web of human and non-human objects implied by the motif of the inscription device.





## Chapter 4

### Relational methods and the Archive

#### 4.0 Messy methodologies

As we have begun to see, a methodological framework for the kind of research which deals with the relational “mess” of assemblage does not lend itself to formula, or linearity. What I hope to do over the course of this chapter is to detail in as much clarity as possible the way in which the indistinctness of the radio archive was selected, approached, drawn on, narrativised or otherwise “written” over the course of this research. In a recent review into methodologies of popular geopolitics, and the need to embrace the more-than-human, Dittmer & Gray (2010) suggest that the sub-field has taken textual artefacts and the “elite visions” as its objects of analysis to the point of myopia, and issues calls to go beyond this through the adoption of methodologies of the “everyday”, in relation to audiences, performance and embodiment; networked ontologies and non-representational theories. Whilst I agree with the spirit of these calls, I will argue here and throughout this thesis, that there is no reason we cannot use these theories and the various methods to bear on the “relatively empowered media functionaries like writers and reporters” (Ibid, 1749) and the human and non-human networks within which they are implicated in a way which can provide genuine insight into a networked view of popular geopolitics. In this way relational methodologies are employed here to address what Nigel Thrift (2000, 382) has termed the “little things” of (popular) geopolitics, “devices like lists, tables, charts, maps, statistics, the prose of reports, and so on to produce models of instances of times and spaces in other times and spaces”. Conceived this way, the “field” of primary source material so central to analysis of the popular geopolitical is expanded to include apparently peripheral written archives that include documents,

images and other texts that challenge traditional notions of what we think of as the geopolitical.

As I will show in this chapter, radio, as the object of analysis towards which the thesis is directed, and the Cold War historical context which provides the case study period, presents a set of challenges to methodologies of popular geopolitics in general. This is largely due to an exceedingly limited quantity of *recorded* radio broadcasts from this period in the archive. Consequently, the hybrid assemblage theory developed in the previous chapter is turned towards the written archive of radio, and the expansive field of objects, texts and relations contained therein. As such, I will discuss in section 4.1 how the particular challenges of dealing with the absent, or ephemeral “matter” of historical radio broadcasting can not only be accommodated but enlivened by this theoretical framework.

One issue with utilising relational methods such as assemblage theory or ANT (or anti-methods) is a basic philosophical problem: infinite regress. If, as for Latour, Law (and I think DeLanda too), everything is in principle relatable to everything else, the question presents itself, “when do we stop?”; if there is no “universal mediator” (the aether, space, time) then how do things ever actually affect each other? Illustrating, as Andrew Barry does, the geopolitics of central Asia through the dense relationality of multiple human and non-human objects in networks around an oil pipeline can still be met with criticism along the lines of “if everything causes everything else, how does anything cause anything?” Latour’s response, according to Harman, would be simply, that we can stop “When it gets boring”. This is neither as glib nor arrogant as it first appears; whilst metaphysicians may wish to continue the argument, the point of thinking relational assemblage for the social world(s) of popular culture presupposes, as I have argued, a *real* social world in which things, people and events *do* take place and what is called for in our methodological engagement with these things is a thought-through and justified set of decisions which are, no more or less than any other research project, metaphysically arbitrary. As assemblage theory “[s]tresses the nature of society as a series of always emergent processes, with different components interacting and potentially producing new societal forms” (Davies, 2011: 24), the justification for selecting *some* of these societies, processes and forms and not others is inevitable. The “societies” referred to in this case being any collection of objects and relations whatsoever. A book is a society of words,

prepositions, tenses and other components of language, but it is, at the same time, a series of meanings, references to previous texts (intertextuality), reflections of an editor, historical document. It does not cease here though, it is also a physical reality, made of paper, ink, with a decimal classification, an object with Euclidian dimensions on a shelf. Concomitantly, a radio broadcast is a pattern of waves oscillating, transmitting a signal, it is also a series of interactions between individual parts of a network (broadcast and reception), (geo) political circumstances, infrastructural possibilities and knowledge architectures, even between individual parts of a given radio set, and *also* a society of words, prepositions, inflections, grammars etc...As I have pointed out, however, assemblage theory, neither presupposes, nor requires, that we access, narrate or present every possible configuration or set of association between these various “societies”. In the case of the particular time period covered in this research, and the nature of the archive covered by this period, the absence of broadcast recordings means that this is impossible. Instead, the written remains of the radio assemblage must stand in for the absent materiality of the broadcast(s) themselves.

This way of viewing the world as composed of distinct “real” objects and things, which nevertheless seem to give way to an expansive field of relations in the very instant we examine them poses a series of questions for research methods. Some of these questions have been answered (or approached) through the conduct of social science research. The idea that technical media affect not only the structure of the archive but also potentially the structures of the minds producing it is contained in Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, alongside the preposition that because of this, acts and practices of archivization produce the events they archive and are inextricable from them (Derrida, 1998:17). The link between the discursive constructions of the archive and the technologies of mediation implicated in their archivization can be found by turning again to the media archaeology of Jussi Parikka and Eric Huhtamo, who make the compelling claim for the inter-action between the discursive and a material “real”, when they point out that

“Power is no longer circulated and reproduced solely through spatial places and institutions such as the clinic or the prison, as Foucault analysed – or practices of language, but takes place in the switches and relays, software and hardware, protocols and circuits of which our technical media systems are made”(Parikka & Huhtamo, 2012:68).

These methodological promptings, while not explicitly linked to assemblage theories nonetheless should be seen firmly within this light; that the texts of popular geopolitics, its broadcasts, serials and identity constructions are parts, important parts, of wider assemblages of material objects, codes and practices. In light of this and the theoretical discussion of the previous chapter, I would re-iterate my commitment to a “relational realism”, whereby the discursive formations of popular geopolitical texts are taken as inseparable from the wider *media* within which they are constituted.

What this means for the study of world politics is that “Conventional methods of explaining and understanding cannot capture the rampant mobility, flexibility and contingency of assemblages” (Lisle 2014: 70); what it means for methodologies is that it “exceeds, disrupts and reworks established methodological rules and conventions”(Ibid: 71). Consequently we may only ever hope to see a snapshot of relations between things as they crystalize at any given moment. As discussed in the theoretical framework, this means that by thinking in a way which grants all things equal status is to create a world which “(contains) atoms and molecules as much it contains children, bullet trains, raindrops, climate, Tsunamis, earthquakes, fire, politicians and numerals” (Harman, 2009: 14); a world in which “Every actant is simply what it is. No actant is just fodder for others; each enhances and resists the others in highly specific ways” (Ibid, 15). The upshot of this, in terms of method, is the illustration (often using non-linear, unusual forms of narrative) of various networks of actants whose effects are determined by the strength of their associations. Whilst it should be clear that these associations are *not* equivalent to discourses, they may be understood as such when texts make up a significant number of relevant actants. The flattening of ontological relations in this way has a corollary for historiographical research, which is largely itself written from a human centric perspective, as one scholar has suggested “[m]ost of the material available as history, from this perspective, is an endeavour that essentializes the contingent transience of networked existence into an exclusive affair of human trajectory narrated from a privileged theoretical position or from the gaze of the dominant gender, class or caste” (Madhu, 2012: 3). This, again, poses a problem: if history *itself* is merely the attempt to codify the transient, chaos and complexity of the infinite worlds of actants, then any attempts to capture the historical would run into two

problems: firstly the traditional discursive issue of historical narrative being merely the dominant or hegemonic thought image of a given epoch or period, but secondly even within these narratives, the material issue of how these narratives themselves assume a human-centric and fixed system of objects. Whilst recognising this issue, I dispute it: firstly it falls into an inverted solipsism, going so far to de-privilege the human mind that the idea of research itself becomes meaningless; secondly because to adopt assemblage or Latourian ANT as an *ethos* or *orientation* is perfectly feasible, whilst maintaining a practical approach, using conventional archival methods to read the archive, albeit in a non-conventional manner (e.g. Dwyer & Davies 2009). This is a mode of reading historical material, then, which existed and continues to exist, but has undergone a shift in the way in which this existence is recorded and transcribed.

#### **4.1 Radio Research and the Archive**

The radio archives used in this research are all written, containing documents, photographs, maps and other texts which are histories-traces-of objects but also objects themselves. The challenge for this research (and, in a sense, for all archival research) has emerged from a deceptively simple question: how are we to write histories or tell stories about things of which only very sparse traces remain; if the ethos of assemblage is expansive, how are we to write about the spaces into which it expands? (The absence here being specifically that of recordings of an aural medium). This is, in a sense, the challenge of all historically focused humanities research: Goethe's aphorism that,

“The least of what happened and what had been spoken was written down; of what had been written down, only the smallest fraction was preserved”(Qtd in Kittler 1999, 36)

is particularly apt when thinking about the radio archive. So little of what was broadcast was ever recorded, particularly in the early decades of radio: vinyl and then reel-reel recordings were often repeatedly recorded over or destroyed, such was the limited scale of the capacity to store such recordings. As such, the

materiality of radio's archive is even more of a "fragment of a fragment": lost at the moment of transmission, in the sense of being recorded in this form, broadcast archiving (when it did happen) took the form of typed up and stored scripts. Similarly, what remains of radio's material infrastructure is similarly ephemeral: many of the structures and network sites have been long since decommissioned or replaced, leaving only traces such as schematics, memos, letters and other bureaucratic ephemera. The broadcast absence, however, has been accommodated by post-structuralist work in radio studies, most notably by Josephine Dolan, who suggests that the "voice" of the broadcast is not limited to the aural recording itself "not an object to be recovered from the archive, but...is...produced in the relationship between researcher, methodology and archive"(Dolan 2003: 63).

These sensibilities, for Dolan, who herself conducted research into the radio archive at the BBC in Caversham, where parts of this thesis' empirical material is drawn, address the fundamental problematic of radio/broadcast studies, where "the vast bulk of output perished in the moment of transmission. The fleeting, unrecorded character of early radio seems obstinately to resist the possibility of historical reclamation"(Scannell & Cardiff, 1991 xiii, qtd in Dolan, 2003: 66) . In light of the methodology of assemblage, any attempt to assert the superiority of a recorded broadcast to the written traces of it would, reflexively, fall foul of the idea that we can reduce any social explanation, agency or objects to the effect of another. I would go further than Dolan, and suggest in line with the theoretical trajectories of new materialism, that the absent "voice" can be found not only in the scripts of radio programs that remain, but also in the engineering, coverage and other technical documents which are retained within the archive, which speak to the historical interactions between humans and matter which constituted the radio assemblage during the 1960's. These interactions, as I will show in later chapters, mattered as to the construction of geopolitical broadcast power of the network, the world-construction of BBC news and also the more nebulous militarisms of cold war nuclear politics.

As John Law argues, it is "the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular" which composes the social world. This statement applies equally well here, with radio broadcasts being an archetypal example of this kind of ephemerality, ill-suited to existing methodological frameworks because "they assume that the world is made

up of a set of fairly specific, determinate, and more or less identifiable processes”(Law 2004: 5, emphasis in original). Archival research is often heralded for the extent to which it can condense a wide array of material encountered by the researcher into a smaller narrative; for the ways in which it can assist the understanding of what has gone before through attention to the always partial recollections of individuals, groups, organisations and states. This research project engages this but also, in a way, the opposite question: how can we tell a wider, more expansive story about a relatively limited range of materials which nevertheless speak to much larger, unseen wholes which, nevertheless, may not be “whole” at all.

The vast majority of radio broadcasts in the age prior to mass storage and retrieval are paradoxical, even mystical objects: they are extensive in their reach during the brief moments of their existence (in the experience of listening audiences) and yet, barring recording, cease to exist in the moment after they have concluded. What remains? Historians of radio beginning to address these questions have pointed out that even though the “ghastly impermanence” of early broadcast transmissions precludes the analysis of the sound archive, a vast wealth of other documentation remains, “From the minutes of BBC management boards and departmental meetings, from the policy files on all aspects of programmes, from the production files and all transcriptions of programmes-as broadcast, from contributors files, from listener research reports, from the splendid press cuttings collection, as well as from the *Radio Times* and *The Listener*” (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991 xiii, qtd in Dolan, 2003: 66). This thesis suggests, primarily, that these materials are worthy of consideration in light of theories of social assemblage and OOO and proposes the following of four archival strands to attempt to narrate these stories in light of assemblage theories and modalities of popular cultural research adapted for popular geopolitics in Dittmer (2010).

- The remains of networks and infrastructures on by which popular geopolitics is made (Technological medium)
- Existing scripts of broadcasts which remain in the archive (intertextual/framing of perspective)
- The biographies of individuals making broadcasts (situating in a broader popular cultural context)

- Artistic and conceptual imaginations of radio (alternative ways of imagining “broadcasting”)

From the outset, it may seem unusual to limit our considerations to these locations. A case could be made for suggesting that the most potent remainder of broadcasts lies in the memories of listeners themselves. Those who heard wartime broadcasts made by Winston Churchill, for example, may recount vividly the power of such stirring oratory, or those who first heard news of the assassinations of, for example, John Lennon, John F Kennedy or Indira Ghandi may recount the shock and disbelief experienced while listening to news of these events as mass mediated traumas, recollections which may well be of interest to ethnographers or sociologists. These kinds of studies hold no little interest in and of themselves, but are not the focus of this research, as here I am concerned primarily with culture, representation, literature, aesthetics and historiography rather than data sets, interviews, questionnaires or other instrumental tools devised for the recording of the social world. As Law suggests, “[t]he task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable. When they no longer assume that this is what they are after” (Law, 2004: 6). This is due to social reality constantly outstripping the capacities of definitive, causal methods to explain it, because “[e]vents and processes are not simply complex in the sense that they are technically difficult to grasp (though this is certainly often the case). Rather, they are also complex because they *necessarily exceed our capacity to know them*” (Ibid, emphasis in original).

In a sense, each of the chapters in this thesis engages in a slightly different set of methodological provocations, all utilising the notion (and substance) of the archive, which were outlined in the introduction but which I will re-state here. The first chapter “Objects, sites, networks” draws on OOO, Martin Heidegger and Graham Harman, in order to connect the generalised assemblage approach to specific objects fossilised in radio-texts. Whilst the chapter offers a discreet geopolitical historiography of its source material, the method is also engaged as much aesthetically as analytically (another tenet of new and post-materialist thought). Following this, the next chapter channels a this hybridity into traditionally discursive analytic tracks, addressing the “text” of the popular geopolitical serial (already well established in terms of its relevance), to the context of BBC radio by placing this

established method into dialogue with DeLanda's identification of language as a "special case" of assemblage, finding that despite these materialist claims to accommodate language in this way, a rigorous method of post-colonial analysis is still necessary to address underlying power relations and representations in popular geopolitical serials. The next chapter, concerning the biographical archive of the foreign correspondent, Leonard Parkin (b.1929-d.1993), seeks to draw both of these methods together and engage in the writing of a cultural geography of the journalist from the perspective of his letters during a period of world-historical and geopolitical significance. This will involve heuristic experimentation in reading the text; identifying the relationship between the text of the letter and the multiple texts outside it, but also the other materials and space-times which hover at its edges; absences (withdrawals) and ironies. Finally, the last chapter offers a reading of how the geopolitics of radio might be imagined otherwise, drawing again on OOO, alongside examples from conceptual art, literature and contemporary history to demonstrate how an expansive reading of the radio spectrum as a geopolitical object opens up novel possibilities for popular geopolitical research.

That these methods are diverse and novel, particularly in relation to the study of media institutions, is one reason they are adopted. It is also an attempt to bring together more strongly the "cultural" and the "political" geographies in which popular geopolitics is located, and to argue that this sub-field cannot purely be restricted to the study of national stereotypes, literary representations of empire or the effect of mass media on global ethics of compassion (for example), but can offer a way in which these questions may be considered in multiplicity. Whilst the analytical focus of the research begins with texts discovered in the archive in these chapters, multiple intertexts are incorporated from organizational, infrastructural, literary and historic sources. The radio archive is thus read metaphorically as something to be "tuned into"; as polyvocal in its textuality. Employing this kind of metaphor-as-speculation is not unique. In a coincidence, the writer and broadcaster Will Self (2013) produced a radio program on modernism for BBC Radio 3 in 2013, the synopsis of which is reproduced from the program notes below:

## **“Modernism Redux**

“Will Self broadcasts an imaginary archive of modernist radio and discusses the influence of modernism today.

In a secret laboratory underneath the BBC archive there is a small room containing a special machine. It's a BBC prototype 'RP-1 Ethermatic remitter'. An experimental machine designed to retrieve ('remit') past radio signals back out of the air. Although partially successful during field trials in 1922 it was never made fully operational...until now.

Will Self has been given access to the machine to investigate the relationship between early radio technology and modern culture. Taking his cue from the *Wasteland* and *Ulysses* - both published as the RP-1 was developed - he will be drawing from the air an assemblage of modernist art and ideas using the very technologies that enabled them. In doing so he hopes to create something that isn't simply about modernism and its after effects but is itself a modernist work.

Around these Will has conducted a series of conversations at the South Bank Centre and Brunel University with leading cultural thinkers such as John Gray, John Carey and John Mullan about the value and use of Modernist ideas now.” (Self, 2013. Available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qdyvf>)

Of course, the ‘RP-1 Ethermatic remitter’ is a fiction, a speculative device employed as a structuring vehicle around which the substance of the radio recordings can be presented to listeners. I include it here for illustrative purposes as it demonstrates how creative methods have and can be employed to deal with the discontinuities and absences of radio’s sound archive and, more importantly, how we might think assemblage as a way of engaging a similar practice with reference to the written

archive. In order to “hear” the patterns of influence in the popular geopolitics of BBC radio, we must be more attentive to radio metaphors of “static”, “interference”, and their relevance to writing the radio archive-as-assemblage. “Weird” or imaginary media objects are given special attention in Parikka’s *Media Archaeology*, as a way of addressing the anxieties, hallucinations, distortions and archives of media technologies. What I propose in relation to this thesis is somewhat less fantastical than this, but use it to make the point that through mobilising assemblage as a conceptual architecture through which the distinctly modernist valences of the radio archive can be imagined and written differently in relation to the geopolitical.

Another, related, methodological cue, from “traditional” critical international relations taken by this thesis comes from Lene Hansen (2006), whose model of discourse analysis in *Security as Practice*, took as one of its central insights that analysis of foreign policy can be undertaken from the perspective of textual influence, trace and intertext on individuals and organisations involved in this practice as much as it can objective, rationalised calculations of cost-benefit. Hansen’s example offers an empirical discourse analytic model, grounded in David Campbell’s earlier theoretical work tracing the influence upon President Bill Clinton of Robert Kaplan’s book *Balkan Ghosts* which, itself, was grounded in the travel narratives of Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon* during the Bosnian war of the early 1990’s. Hansen’s point, here, and one with relevance for me, is that these texts all *acted* in the world, but in *alliances* with various other objects and forces to produce the assemblage “American foreign policy” during the Bosnian war. Similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, similar constructions can be seen in the influence of both exploration narratives, colonial fiction and material structures of power in the construction of US foreign policy during the genocide in Rwanda (Weir, 2008).

If this “methodology after method” has, in this case, its own (messy) intellectual lineage, it is most likely situated between post-colonial literary criticism/discourse analysis, augmented by the expansive ontology of assemblage and actor-networks discussed in the previous chapter to go beyond the simple text. If discourses “refer to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought” (Rose 2007, 142), then social assemblages refer to the wider network of relations, modalities and objects within and between which discourses take place. Intertextuality, similarly, is

considered as the way in which various discursive but also non-discursive things act upon each other. This methodological work into the analysis of cultural texts still looms large in contemporary accounts of popular geopolitics; by way of a synthesis, I would argue that the methodology employed in this thesis draws strongly on her delineation of “Discourse analysis I and Discourse analysis II” as two modes of undertaking this kind of research. This distinction, Rose identifies, locates the former as the analysis of visual and textual artefacts to locate power, difference and other properties articulated through these artefacts where the latter refers to the analyses of wider texts and artefacts illustrating structures of power and knowledge within which primary textual artefacts exist and often the specific sites at which these operate, such as galleries, museums or even the archive itself (Rose, *Ibid*, 177). Where I would suggest the theoretical hybrid and my subsequent methodology goes beyond this, through assemblage, is to create a kind of “Discourse analysis III”, which speaks *both* to “forms of talk and text” and “Practices of institutions concerned with power, truth and technologies” (Rose: *Ibid*) *and also* to try to give voice to the ways in which a more heterogeneous system of material objects supporting, facilitating, enlivening, frustrating or dictating these texts and practices might be imagined. Rose writes mainly in relation to visual culture, and applying these concerns to radio, which is at the same time both visual and non-visual, sensible and insensible, will place the methodological challenges posed by this in a different light. The subsequent sections take the archival materials and methodology involved in each substantive chapter in turn, outlining some key methodological decisions related to the approach discussed above, but also justifications for these.

As the empirical chapters of this thesis take multiple points of entry to different archives, a total narrative is neither possible, nor aimed at. This is intentional, to address the ontology of assemblage to the multifarious temporalities and histories of popular geopolitical texts, rather than a structured, chronological narrative. The technique, then, of trying to read cultural assemblage as a multiplicity of forces, texts, people, ideas and objects which exist both apart and linked through shifting chains of association necessarily, which are neither separable from or reducible to the formation in which they are presented here. Broadly speaking, the thesis covers the period between 1960 and 1968, although there are frequent lines of flight taken to other temporalities (both factual and fictional) during the course of the archival

research and writing (particularly in chapters 5 and 7). This period was selected primarily due to it being both under-researched in relation to radio and cultural politics, but also the wealth of source material that exists within this timeframe. The administrative fetish for record keeping, however partial, seems to speak particularly strongly through the BBC during this period, and whilst they are not immaculate, the technical, managerial and script records during the 1960's are perhaps the most comprehensive of those held at Caversham. It should be seen, then, as an explicit attempt to engage a method which "rummages textual, visual and auditory archives as well as collections of artefacts, emphasizing *both* the discursive and material manifestations of culture" (Parrika: 2011, 3, my emphasis). The remainder of this chapter will deal in turn with both the practical details of how the archival sources on which the substantive chapters of the thesis draws were selected, accessed and incorporated into the methodological and theoretical frameworks which have been discussed in this and the previous chapter's theoretical framework.

#### **4.2 Networked ontologies of media objects: The technical archive**

In order to expand on the theoretical framework identified in the previous chapter – this is to say using texts to go "beyond" texts – the research originated in a project to map the changes in a popular geopolitical "serial", an extensive archive of which had been identified. This radio program, *From our Own Correspondent* was initially the primary focus of the archival research, and sought to adopt and adapt previous examples of research in the popular geopolitics and the serial conducted by Sharp and Dittmer respectively. During the early stages of the primary archival encounters at the BBC's written archives centre at Caversham, certain "things" began to emerge, to bleed in from the margins of the archive. Research into the early, procedural and institutional dynamics of the programs production yielded little in the way of preserved documentation relating to how the program came about, although what did remain is covered in Chapter 6. What it did reveal was some very specific technical information relating to the mechanics of BBC radio broadcasting in the post-World War II period. The BBC's written archive cataloguing system is oblique to say the least. Although it reveals that where it is conspicuously lacking in

*recorded* material (a concern addressed in the introduction and literature review), it is replete with the traces left by broadcasting objects. Maps, aerial plans, diagrams, land surveys (in addition to program scripts and institutional memoranda); all with an underlying instrumental logic of making the broadcast heard, of making the text legible; the hidden materiality of radio power during the Cold War. The existence of and engagement with this archive changed both the focus of the research and the direction of the theoretical tools used to address it. Instead of asking questions purely about the “serial” and its relevance as a popular geopolitical text, the serial was taken as one object amongst many.

Instead of seeking to conduct a purely discourse analytic exercise into the serial across a broad timeframe, I decided to utilise the philosophies of assemblage, actor network theory and object oriented ontologies to ask wider questions about the medium through which the serial was being broadcast. What composes radio? So much of what we cannot see, of what we take for granted, withdraws from presence. Material objects then, and the traces they leave behind are as vital a component of media assemblage, they have the materiality of radio literally imprinted upon them. The selection of the materials which compose chapter 5: the building of the Middle Eastern Relay System at Masirah between 1965 and 1967 and the transfer of a radio set to Kurt Huber, a BBC Monitor in Vienna in 1967 were selected after engagement with the archive files at Caversham pertaining to the overseas relay service generally and BBC monitoring. Whilst certain documents were found relating to other relay stations; at Ascension Island in the Mid-Atlantic and Terbrau in Malaysia, it was Masirah in Arabian Sea which retained by far the most extensive documentation of the technical and organisational discussions regarding its construction. In addition to this, parallel files relating to the project were discovered at the National Archives, particularly the report of Sir Thomas Rapp into external services broadcasting from 1965, allowing for a more integrated perspective to be adapted to the material in question, with these records belonging to the Foreign and Commonwealth, Air Force and Diplomatic Wireless Archives. The existing research framework of popular geopolitics, as outlined in the literature review, also stresses the importance of understanding how popular culture becomes a vector for geopolitical power and/or influence, and these two empirical examples speak to this whilst using the idea of the

co-constitution of humans, non-humans, politics and materials within the socio-material “black boxes” of organisations such as the BBC (Muller, 2008).

### **4.3 Programs, Scripting, Popular Geopolitics**

As discussed above, the radio program *From Our Own Correspondent* was initially the primary focus of the research and it forms the empirical basis of Chapter 6. Encounters with the archive and the fleshing out of the possibilities for a new theoretical contribution to the study of popular geopolitics though, meant that the types of archival sources needed to be given equal weight (as this was a key point of the argument), and hence the serial, as a geopolitical scripting must be regarded as ontologically equal to the infrastructural broadcasting networks and texts within which it was implicated, as opposed to seeing these as purely a mute vehicle through which these texts were transported and transmitted. To relate this back to previous methodological approaches, there are acknowledgements in both Sharp and Dittmer’s work as to the nature of the “transmission” medium of the serial they write about: comics and magazines. Attending to these media in the manner I propose to do here with radio would, in their research, necessitate the wider study of (for example) printing presses, *Readers Digest* distribution networks, salesmen and delivery boys/girls, shipping manifests, quantities of colour ink available during the Cold War period; overall a recognition that, as discussed in the previous chapter, a text is both representative of something, but also *is something, does something*. Here, the question of “what constitutes radio?” is answered with reference to a minute, but significant slice of its textual and linguistic representation, but constantly with an awareness that these artefacts stand for a lack, a missing materiality of transmission which existed and ceased to exist almost simultaneously. In this sense, the chapter follows most closely a “traditional” popular geopolitical analysis but, through drawing attention to these absences in the archive, goes beyond these readings.

With this in mind the archive of *FooC* presented both significant challenges and opportunities. The storage-retrieval structure of the archive presented perhaps the greatest challenge to this: stored on several microfilm reel-reel tapes, the program scripts were catalogued back to back on the reels between 1960 and 1966. However, after this period the program scripts are absorbed into the “general-date” microfiche storage: scripts catalogued by date, between 1966 onwards. With no accurate way of finding the program at specific points within each tape, and also no way of extracting the text to code it, to establish uniform patterns of representation. What other methods remain? Or rather, how does reading radio as cultural assemblage open up a different register of methods for writing about the radio program? These encounters were also a constant reminder that whilst storage and retrieval of vast quantities of data have become so unproblematic in recent decades as to change almost entirely existing research paradigms in some social sciences (the tyranny of “big data” for example), so much relevant information remains, whilst easily “accessible”, recalcitrant to advanced technological modes of storage and search. The micro-film still remains fundamentally dependant on the *reader*, the eye; an archive still locked in a human-machine relation which is subject (to a degree of) oversight, exhaustion, distraction, time pressure; without complex algorithms or search engines to do “heavy lifting”.

The key, I think, lies in the special ontological position granted to language in assemblage theory as a specific assemblage *in its own right*, albeit one characterised by a subtly different set of relations conditioning its operation. DeLanda (2002, 61) points to this, illustrating two different assembly processes in his early philosophy of science, “The process behind the creation of industrial products, as it takes place in an assembly line factory, for example, and the process taking place within and among living cells which results in the assembly of tissues and organs.” The former, he argues, are largely Euclidean, “having rigid metric properties such as sizes, shapes and positions, a fact that limits the kind of procedures that may be followed for their assembly. These procedures must include a rigidly channelled transport system...as well as sequences of rigid motions to correctly position the parts relative to one another” (Ibid,60). In contrast to this, parts in “biological assembly” are characterised “less by rigid metric properties than by their *topological connectivity*...(which)...allows component parts to be *not inert but*

*adaptive*, so that muscle lengths can change to fit longer bones, and skin can grow and fold adaptively to cover both” (Ibid). As we shall see in chapter two, this is a series of capacities he grants to *language* as well as biological assembly or, to put it another way, language and biologic assemblies/assemblages are different from other types of assemblage.

What this means for method is that instead of looking to the text of the script as something to be fully catalogued and coded in the manner of discursive analysis, the material components of the language should be looked for in the adaptive relationship between radio and language, and adaptive patterns in the text can be discerned from reading the script archive. Language is adaptive in this way, because it can change or be changed to fit different contexts, conditions of mediation, requirements of meta-languages such as broadcast talk to alter both semantic content through use of more sensual or visual language, but also non semantic, expressive components such as tone, cadence, accent, emotional inflection or suppression. For DeLanda these components of language adapt to given situations, but I would argue also adapt when coming into contact with other assemblages, or assembly processes (like radio). At its most basic level, this can be seen in the adaption of language and unit operators to the creation of the language of software code. In addition to this, as I discussed in the theoretical framework, the text contains within it multiple other virtual or unactualized texts, which “haunt a manifest text” (Bryant, 2010). The actualized text interacts with the real material world, but the other virtualities and time-spaces always, again, hover in the wings.

*FooC* is clearly not the only program which could have been selected in order to illustrate how assemblage theories operate in popular geopolitics. The BBC retains extensive archives of news programs, both past and present. However, none are so complete as the *FooC* script archive between 1960 and 1966 and the more recent editions between 2009 and the present (along with the five edited collections). In addition to this, the program retains a consistent form throughout its history, enabling content comparisons across periods. Prior to the conduct of the research various alternative strategies were considered including interviews with listeners in response to programs. It was felt, though, that as the depth, relevance and potential originality of the archival research became more apparent, the validity of focusing the thesis along the lines of a historiography, seeking to make a contribution to the

understanding of geopolitics and popular culture, dictated the direction of the research.

#### 4.4 Biographical texts

Whilst assemblage and other materialist or neo-materialist theories generally look to unsettle the human-world world-human correlation, my research here, as I have discussed in the earlier chapters, does not seek to abolish the human in its adoption of these theories for the analysis of popular geopolitics. Human *being* is also an assemblage, a society of material and expressive components, agencies and affects; acting and acted upon. Instead, in Chapter 6, through the analysis of a series of documents from a biographical archive, I seek to situate the foreign correspondent as an individual in the middle of various forces, historical-cultural atmospherics, *zeitgeist*. The letters are taken as a found-archive, situated within a given context. Their content is not coded or systematically analysed as a data set using “hard” social science tools (as useful as these may be), but rather read in light of recent developments in literature and cultural studies into the relationship between history, biography and memory; these broader cultural contexts are, then, the modalities on which the material is engaged in relation to popular geopolitics.

The archive in question was discovered during secondary research to locate materials relevant to individual contributors to the program *From our own Correspondent (FOOC)*. Indeed, using cross-referencing from the National Archives, it was found that the letters and papers of Leonard Parkin were the only systematically preserved records of one of the program’s contributors from this period. The “physical” archive itself consisted of a single box containing press cuttings, early employment records and correspondence. It was, however, a series of letters, numbering over a hundred, written from Parkin to his mother during his first series of foreign postings, between 1963 and 1965, which provided the material basis for Chapter 7.

The letters were approached without a view to systematic analysis. Initially they were disorganised, and a large period of time was spent ordering and photographing

them, so that they could then be transcribed (as they were handwritten) and then analysed for relevance to the popular geopolitical-assemblage approach described above. One major benefit of the assessment of Parkin's archive is that as a correspondent he spent the majority of his time in North America, both in Canada and the United States. Popular geopolitics regularly references research into the representation of the exotic Other, even when they may be located internally (Jansson 2003) or at a distance (Myers et al 1996). However, there are limitations in the literature on how, for example, occidental or Western countries engage in patterns of representation *vis a vis* each other. Parkin's letters from this period provide an invaluable set of materials with which to begin to address this question.

The thesis uses images and photographs throughout, some taken by the author from the archive as a way of illustrating arguments made. Due to the age and fragility of some of the documents researched, it was impossible to produce representations in the text in any other manner. In other chapters, images are taken from those available in the public domain or under creative commons. In these cases the images are selected for aesthetic or affective reasons, once again to illustrate components of the assemblage. In this sense, the technique is indebted to writers such as W.G. Sebald, whose use of adapted photographs to engender new lines of flight within his work I borrow from, in Chapter 6, alongside an attempt to draw on an initial set of archival sources/objects – letters – to write and consider the life-path of the correspondent, and the reporting of historical events more generally, in a manner different from “ordinary” historiography. They are also employed to utilise and illustrate the relational tools outlined in the theoretical framework to explore the multiple space-times nested within the space of the letters; space-times which maybe factual or fictional, may contain references to other texts, or to the presence of material objects. The purpose of this is to experiment with the archive through free association and the historical record.

#### **4.5 Imagining Radio Otherwise**

The final substantive chapter of the thesis looks to build on the idea of imagining the different *frequencies* of electromagnetic radiation contained within the radio spectrum as a yet another example of geopolitical assemblage. One of the earliest

pieces of “fieldwork” in the research forms the basis for the final substantive chapter. A major international art exhibition in Barcelona, held early in 2012, entitled *Invisible Fields: The Geography of Radio Waves*. Showing works from a range of conceptual artists, activists, experimental geographers and art-science collaborations, the exhibition sought to engage the materiality of artistic practice to represent the “ocean of transmission spaces” engendered by the history of radio and radio technologies. Some of the exhibition and its catalogue are drawn on here, and read as both text and material practice, and brought to bear in relation to the chapters which have gone before as another mode, another archive from which we might draw an understanding of how the radio assemblage exists. Through thinking of art and the aesthetic as the product of a multiplicity of relational fields involving humans, non-humans, technologies, materials and affects, the chapter takes some themes and works from the exhibition, alongside other works which open up and speak to the wider idea of “radio” and “radioactive environments” to conceive of broadcast-reception dynamics as something different, and in relation to geopolitics, something often altogether darker and more deadly.

Methodological interventions into the value of art as both an object of research and a research method in its own right have emerged in cultural geography and popular geopolitics recently. (Hawkins 2013, 54) has suggested that “Exploring art-geography engagements is less to turn away from the politics of representation that shaped earlier engagements, but rather is to appreciate an expanded base of inquiry that incorporates, and often reworks, such representational politics.” In geopolitical registers, art, particularly public art, has been seen recently by scholars to be one field in which geopolitics can be “made otherwise” through the subversion of technologies of security and violence inherent to geopolitical control but also through the re-arrangement of what Jacques Ranciere has termed the “distribution of the sensible”, by which dominant geographic and geopolitical imaginaries can be critiqued and undermined through artistic interventions into public space (Ingram 2011, 221). Taking this as a cue, the chapter assesses various ways in which the geography and geopolitics of radio as an entanglement of materials might be imagined, with particular reference to conceptual art and literature. This chapter is written, through various close readings of examples in art and popular culture, to engage the more expansive field of “radio relations” as an space of interaction

between different kinds of bodies (human and non-human), through different geopolitical frequencies of the radio spectrum. The way(s) in which art-objects can work to re-configure notions of “world” necessarily brings into question what we think of as “geopolitics” in general, and consequently the value of art as a research method is further enhanced as we move towards these questions.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Both this chapter and the one preceding it have addressed some of the potentialities for novel theoretical positions and methodological approaches to the study of radio and news as popular geopolitical media. In the next chapter, then, I propose an archival reading of a certain series of points in radio technological history. Through a technique of vignette, mixing archival stories, literature, official documents and historical analysis I want to show how we can assess popular geopolitical, cultural and social history through dialogue with media and technology studies. The chapter, the first to engage specifically the empirical material found in the archive, will map the technical components found in a particular time-slice of the BBC’s written archives in light of the theories of assemblage and ANT discussed in the conceptual framework. As such, it opens with a contextualised history of radio as a technology within media studies generally and geography particularly. Following this, the technique of archival vignette is engaged to track the “stories” of two networked objects within the radio assemblage. Firstly, the BBC’s Middle Eastern Relay Station at Masirah, Oman and secondly, a radio set distributed by the BBC’s monitoring service to an Austrian volunteer monitor. These two narratives are engaged for the linkages between institutions (the BBC and the Diplomatic Wireless Service) and archives they opened up (i.e. the BBC and the National Archives), but also because they provide bounded examples through which the study of objects, sites and networks can be explored as part of the popular geopolitical assemblage of radio.

As with other empirical chapters of this thesis, though, and because of the concept of relationality which is so central to my approach, the chapter does not try to tell a completely linear story. The study of the relay system, for example, quickly evolved and became inextricable (within my mind) from the place in which it was located, and the enduring geopolitical substrate contained within its history, for example.

Consequently, proper effort is made to “show the working”, to show how relations quickly expand, much as in chemical reactions; how fact and fiction as two ontologically equal entities (in how they affect the world) often combine when we view the archive, and how crucial this is to the political geographies of assemblage and objects I argue for here.



## Chapter 5

# Networked Assemblages of Radio: Governance, Sites and Objects

*“Thinking in terms of networks, according to Latour, problematizes the proximity/distance and local/global distinctions, in short geography as we have conventionally known it. The science of geography, of mapping, measuring and triangulating physical space, is useless, according to Latour, for ANT, for it seeks to define universal measures of proximity, distance and scale based on physical measurements. Proximity, distance and scale, however are defined by the connectivity of a network. ‘The notion of a network helps us to lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor “real” space, but associations.’ If geography is reconceptualised as connectivity not space, traditional ‘real space’ geography is merely one network among multitudes.” (O’Tuathail 2002, 25-60)*

*“We all agree that audibility, and ease of finding the BBC on the dial, are of the first importance. Indeed “audible everywhere on medium waves, with a short wave alternative for difficult day-time conditions” ought to be our slogan.”(Letter from GFN Reddaway, British Embassy, Beirut to Brooks Richards, August, 1965)*

## **5.0 Introduction: The Geopolitics of Radio and Scale**

In this first empirical chapter dealing with the substance of radio found through the course of my archival work, the material infrastructures of radio networks and the multiple actants relationally connected by them are explored as they are relevant to the popular geopolitical frames discussed in the earlier chapters. The chapter stages a series of encounters with these archival materials through reading of a certain series of infrastructural moments in BBC radio's popular geopolitics during the mid twentieth century, Cold War era. This is done utilising the theoretical hybrid approach outlined in earlier chapters, beginning with a discussion of the juridical regimes under which British radio broadcasting began in the inter-war period, moving on to a more detailed illustration of some of the specific sites where the geopolitics of the radio network can be seen to manifest themselves as central to the information policy of the Cold War context in relation to East/West competition and the emerging post-colonial North/South environment, both of which Britain and consequently, the BBC found themselves; Through a technique of vignette, mixing archival stories, literature, official documents and historical analysis I show how the hybrid discursive-materialist, assemblage approach to popular geopolitics can take seriously the absent materialities of radio broadcasts which nevertheless remain "fossilised" in the archive in the form of these documents which "stand in" for these absences but also retain a materiality of their own. These illustrations can help to making visible the broadcast networks within which they came into being. By turning the analytical focus in this chapter on to of the various political-geographic registers where technological objects, systems and networks are manifested, but never completely constituted by the various human and organizational relations they enter into, I will show that micro-interactions within macro-level phenomena are as valid and important a way as any of thinking about the practices of popular geopolitics. It should be seen, then, as an explicit attempt to engage the recent development of a archaeology of media that "rummages textual, visual and auditory archives as well as collections of artefacts, emphasizing both the discursive and material manifestations of culture" (Parrika 2011, 3).

The genesis of thinking the materiality of media in this way lies, to an extent, in the understanding of modernity as both a cultural and material epoch in which experiences of hitherto relatively stable concepts such as distance, time, light and vision were distorted, compressed or elongated is often explained in with reference to Marx's famous idiom:

“All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.” (Marx 1848, see also Berman 1983).

One of the major cultural consequences of this disintegration was the need for an entirely new vocabulary to account for, or even to talk about changes taking place in external reality.<sup>11</sup> This enlivening of the air is all too often regarded as a mere metaphor for the collapsing of traditional epistemologies and cosmologies. It is, therefore, forgotten that this was also to be taken *literally*. Things that had once been considered solid physical objects began to evaporate as they were transubstantiated into invisible matter. This is nowhere clearer than in the changes in communications technologies brought about as a result of the discovery and instrumentalisation of the electromagnetic spectrum (see Harvey 1989). Suddenly, a letter or communiqué was disassembled into its constituent parts, coded into electricity and despatched at phenomenal speed through a technological network of objects, to be re-assembled with the aid of a receiver at a distant point in geometric space. The effect of this profound alteration in the relationship between physical and ephemeral matter is quoted here at length

“The telegraph is a cause of nervousness the potency of which is little understood. Before the days of Morse and his rivals, merchants were far less worried than now, and less business was transacted in a given time; prices fluctuated far less rapidly, and the fluctuations which now are transmitted instantaneously over the world were only known then by the slow communication of sailing vessels or steamships; hence we might wait for weeks or months for a cargo of tea from China, trusting for profit to prices that should follow their arrival; whereas, now, prices at each port are known at once all over the globe. This continual fluctuation of values, and the constant knowledge of those fluctuations in every part of the world, are the scourges of business men, the tyrants of trade -- every cut in prices in wholesale lines in the smallest of any of the Western cities, becomes known in less than an hour all over

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to engage here with the very specific and ongoing debate in comparative historiography as to *when* modernity *began* and *where*.

the Union; thus competition is both diffused and intensified. Within but thirty years the telegraphs of the world have grown to half a million miles of line, and over a million miles of wire -- or more than forty times the circuit of the globe. In the United States there were, in 1880, 170,103 miles of line, and in that year 33,255,991 messages were sent over them. (Beard 1881, 96)

It is at the beginning of the twentieth century with the advent of “wireless” technology that the vaporisation of solidity could be said to be truly taking place, and the air itself becomes thought of as a constantly shifting space of transmission, transduction and reception, an infinite series of hybridised encounters between humans and technologies; the air began to “fizz” “bleep” “crackle” and “hum”. Whilst the recent dynamics of change in wireless technologies has reached a level of complexity so great that its analysis becomes problematic at a macro level, what is missing from these geographies is a historical project which demonstrates the points of *emergence* of these perturbations, assemblages, or constellations of objects.

By the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, the logical conclusion of the 400 year Euro-American project of “modernity” and the capacity to act at and project power over distance was, to an extent, realised. The Intercontinental Ballistic Missile is different only in scale, rather than type, from the longbow and, more relevant for our purposes, a radio relay station is similarly different from semaphore or hilltop beacon chains.<sup>12</sup> To focus only on historical geographic *epochs* though, is to neglect the prosaic, the quotidian nature of the practices and things needed for major technological projects to stand a chance of succeeding (see Latour, 1996). If the traumas of modernity demonstrate that even the most horrendous projects were fundamentally reliant on a certain configuration of “ordinary” objects like railway timetables, rubber-stamps, transport manifests, drums of oil, chemicals and ledgers (Bauman 1989), then so too are the more benign (or relatively benign) projects of communications networking. This can be seen through the motto on the heraldic crest of the BBC: “Nation shall speak peace unto nation” (fig 3)

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<sup>12</sup> This paraphrases Kittler (1999) and defends a version of technological determinism to which I am happy to subscribe in relation to the subject of this piece (i.e. the specific question of offshore radio transmission)



Fig.3 The coat of arms of the BBC

This indicates the worldview of an organization operating at the macro-ideological level; a utopian technological determinism predicated on a belief in technology's inevitable domestication of distance and, consequently, the overcoming of (geo) politics through communication. The lightning bolt used on the heraldic crest to signify broadcasting is, perhaps unintentionally, demonstrative of the ambiguities inherent to the birth of modern broadcasting.<sup>13</sup> Much research in communications studies and attendant geographies have focussed on the “contagious”, “monstrous” or “haunted” aspects of prevalent social attitudes towards early twentieth century media (Marvin 1998; Kneale 2010; Sconce 2000). It should be remembered that the lightning bolt haunts Western literature, beginning with the Promethean theft from the gods, and culminating in Frankenstein's mis-recognition of himself *as god* through the instrumentalisation of lightning in occult science to re-animate the creature. This materiality of transmission and signals more generally as a presence in the intertextuality of Western literature has been suggested by the novelist and critic Tom McCarthy who observes that the beacon fire at the beginning of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* “a signal crossing space” (McCarthy 2013, 7), and Clytmnestra's speech immediately thereafter serves as a clear marker of these dynamics. I reproduce the speech here at length because of its direct relevance for networked cartographies I will discuss later on in this chapter.

**“Chorus:** Prithce, what messenger could post so fast?

**Clytmnestra:** Hephaestus launched a radiant signal forth,  
which ran in swift relays of courier flame.  
Ida despatched it first to Hermes' bluff

<sup>13</sup> A lightning bolt overlaid on top of a globe similarly appears on the flag of the International Telecommunications Union.

O'er Lemnus' waters, thence huge Athos, mount  
 Of Zeus, received the giant torch ablaze.  
 Coursing in strength—so high the rosined pile  
 Surmounted yon wide sea—that swiftfoot light  
 Swept gaily brushing o'er the level brine,  
 And to Macistus' summit, like a sun,  
 Announced its golden splendour. He nor dozed  
 Nor dallied with his serviceable task.  
 Far shot the blaze and by Euripus' flood  
 Challenged Messapion's guards, who answering sped  
 The message, mirrored in a flaring heap  
 Of hoary heather. Swift athwart the gloom  
 The beacon crossed Asopus' plain, as 'twere  
 A moonlit wrac, and from Cithaerton's crags  
 Flung yet another tale of missive fire  
 For greeting its bright advent, nothing loth,  
 Their watch uplit a larger hoard than all.  
 Beyond Gorgopis' bay it soared and shone,  
 And climbing Aegiplanctus lingered not,  
 Nor respited the fiery ordinance.  
 Full soon his vigorous fuel threw aloft  
 A mighty beard of flame, whose instant sheen  
 Vanguised the headland high o'er Saron's gulf  
 In one brave leap to Archnaeus' cliff.  
 Then from his watch, that marches with our town,  
 To Atreus' royal eyrie flew apace  
 The lineal child of Ida's parent flame  
 So was my lamp-race ordered; each to each  
 The rival fires succeeded, but the prize  
 Was his, who ran from first to last alone.  
 Thus passed my lord's announcement unto me  
 From Troy. Behold his token and my proof!"

As McCarthy points out, "Clytmnestra names each of the signal's staging posts, following its passage...in effect she's sketching out the nodes and relays of a communication network...Greek beacons were sophisticated objects, elaborate contraptions with movable parts, attendant encryption systems and so on" (McCarthy 2013, 8). The relevance for us here is that the Oresteia contains perhaps the first example of the "networked ontologies" of communication discussed in contemporary accounts of globalization. Further to this, though, the network in Clytmnestra's speech is employed to explicitly geopolitical purposes: to bring news of the Athenian victory at Troy. The networks illustrated in the Oresteia seem to disappear from the cartographic imagination of the middle ages and early modernity, as Christian cosmologies (and consequently practices of mapping and seeing) that emphasised hierarchies, predominated (Cosgrove 2003; Smith 2008).

What this brief sketch of the histories of communications networks is designed to show is that the utility of thinking the material and symbolic trajectories of the politics of these kinds of networks simultaneously, rather than reducing one to the other: the discursive shifts in ideas about communication which came with modernity are irreducible to the really existing materials which paralleled these modes of thinking and vice versa. With these themes in mind then, the rest of this chapter will draw on a series of narrative points illustrating specific registers of radio assemblages as seen in archival encounters with the BBC's written collections selected to demonstrate the material-discursive hybrids contained therein. The first gives a contextualisation of the BBC's role in the geopolitics of early telegraphic and subsequently radio governance, through and the establishment of aerial sovereignty in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as illustrative of precisely how the symbolic-material complexity of assemblage theories can be seen to work. The chapter then moves to a detailed reading of the geopolitics of the territorialized radio assemblage, seen through the construction, maintenance and afterlife of the BBC's Middle Eastern Relay System (MERS). during the Cold War and post-colonial contexts of the mid-late 1960's to further demonstrate *how* the radio network becomes a manifested presence at various sites that are at once physical/territorial and bureaucratic/institutional. The final section of the chapter articulates the motion of a particular object, a radio set, despatched for the purposes of signal monitoring. The diplomatic and political sensitivities involved in the bordering of Cold War Europe are refracted through the lens of the radio assemblage, as the radio set itself moves through different spatial and textual sites and is acted upon by various institutional, political and material forces conditioning these sites. What these different iterations of the radio assemblage will show is that when utilising theories of material-discursive theories in relation to the geopolitics of radio, a range of material and symbolic forces, manifested through specific geographical or political sites or regimes can be discerned in radio's written archive.

## **5.1 Governance assemblages: aerial and radio Network management in Great Britain and Europe in the 1920's**

It did not take long for radio to become of acute interest to practitioners of geopolitics, and the conditions for the geopolitics of material and symbolic radio power seen in the Cold War period were set earlier in the Twentieth Century, when it quickly became clear that the nature of this new technology would provide different sets of challenges and opportunities to states and nations, largely based on their relative sizes, topographies and proximities to other “broadcast” competitors. In the United States, for example, the vast spaces and nature of American enterprise meant that broadcasting in the early twentieth century was largely unregulated, diffuse and chaotic, only falling under the auspices of the law when cases of outright fraud and demagoguery were concerned. Consolidation, when it occurred, was thus predicated on a profit motive, with little state involvement until 1922 when a National Radio Conference in Washington D.C. sought to establish “traffic laws”, based on the belief that “[r]adio communication is a public utility and as such should be regulated and controlled by the federal government in the public interest” (Briggs 1961, 66; see also Hilmes 1997, 2010). Conversely, in the United Kingdom, the power of broadcast speech was taken seriously from the start, and a stringent system of legal regulation was constructed demarcating who was allowed to broadcast and on what frequencies.

This kind of governance can be seen, at least in part as a response to geographical imperatives. The material and symbolic power of broadcasting in a relatively small, densely populated area as opposed to a vast, sparsely populated one is obvious, as smaller force levels would be required to dominate the air or to prevent radio being used to foment political unrest. The consequence of the restrictions imposed on broadcasting meant that the first broadcast entertainment station in Britain, 2MT, which was followed by a sister station 2LO were closed and ultimately transformed into the British Broadcasting Company (later Corporation) under the licensing of the Post Office. Captain Peter Eckersley was, perhaps, Britain's first radio celebrity, his status assured when broadcasting first on 2MT in the early 1920's. Eckersley would

go on to become the BBC's first head of engineering, having had extensive experience of the developing field of wireless technology during the First World War. During his time at the BBC he sought to gain European agreement on the allocation of wavelengths across what was becoming an increasingly crowded European radio space. Before looking to this, though, I want to draw some points Eckersley's own biographical archive, as largely encompassed by his autobiography *The Power Behind the Microphone*, and how this speaks to the question of how the materiality of early radio governance was shown to be of acute political concern. The primitive nature of political knowledge and engineering expertise in the early years of wireless transmission was such that broadcasting and regulation evolved indistinctly, as leaps in material capacities needed to be matched by concurrent shifts in thinking about how these capacities could be brought within the geopolitics of inter-state relations. Recounting the beginning of his career with the BBC, Eckersley illustrates some of these problems, and how techno-cultural assemblages such as the BBC needed to be brought about in order to overcome these:

"Broadcasting...would let me join in events without my having to drag my body all over the place...The BBC was formed as the expedient solution of a technical problem; it owes its existence solely to the scarcity of wavelength...We, the post office, must have the right to decide the power, location and wavelengths of transmitting stations. We shall thus supervise the technical side of broadcasting through our agent: the BBC...the ideology of the BBC might be said to be directly derived from nineteenth century materialism: art is thought to be 'bestial' because it is derived from the senses" (Arthur Burrows: Joint director of programmes" cited in Eckersley 1941, 23)

Following his success at 2MT and 2LO, Eckersley was appointed the first head of engineering for the newly formed BBC. This can be seen within the wider context of the BBC absorbing the "cream" of wireless engineering talent from Marconi. This was perhaps in response to the initial failure of the post office to appreciate the potential of Marconi's equipment, techniques and vision. Eckersley was thus hastily appointed to a position he was almost entirely required to define the role of, with little guidance or assistance:

"I decided to start work by finding a new site for the London transmitter. In those days, in order to avoid the expense of masts, we generally used factory chimneys to hold up the transmitting aerials...I had to think out a *technical policy*. I decided that everyone should be able to hear the programme clearly on a cheap set...I wanted to

use my skill to enable the listener to forget about the technique of the service”(Eckersley, *Ibid*)

This last statement represents what might be thought of as one of the founding technical (but also phenomenological) principles behind broadcasting. Those receiving a given broadcast should be “transported” by the medium. For this to take place successfully, the material components involved must, to an extent, recede from perception. Returning to the theme of Heideggerian phenomenology which is adopted by OOO’s interpretation of tool analysis, the successful impression of the technological enframing of -in this case the “world of events”- through the broadcast medium of radio is premised on the presence-at-hand of the “object” conceived as the radio set. What “withdraws” in the example of the radio set is the *technique*: all of its material components: thermionic valves, aerial, fuse, circuitry; all of the “invisible” waves it conducts, along with the apparatus for the broadcasting of these. All that should be present-at-hand is the (hopefully clear) sound of the song or voice. Again, this is not an uncontroversial reading of phenomenology, as some may argue that to talk of the “withdrawn” or “unseen” components is to miss the point of phenomenology and suggest, with Husserl, that we can *only* talk of what is experienced in any given broadcast medium. The Heideggerian position, though, I feel, captures the particularities of the “withdrawn” elements of technology better.

Now, it is not difficult to see how we might employ a stripped down version of OOO to Eckersley’s broadcast system in relation to the broken tool. The radio startles itself and the listener into an intrusive presence when its reception or signal breaks down. This can happen for any number of reasons: other forces or objects act upon the signal (birds, bad weather, other broadcasters on similar frequencies). The result, however, is almost uniformly the same; the object itself becomes suddenly conspicuous, its presence jarring and demanding of attention though an “unreadiness-to-hand” (Heidegger 1962, 103)<sup>14</sup>. Rather than simply rendering other spaces, purely as a representational medium, for example through the music broadcast from the concert hall or the news from some distant coup, the radio object

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that in the shift from analogue radio to digital, the degree of agency by which listeners may respond to fluctuations in signal reception are substantially altered. Previously the dial could be tuned by hand, or even by an automatic scanner. DAB digital radios, however, often come with pre-set stations and do not allow for individual attunements. Consequently, when signal is disturbed, interrupted or lost, no activity can be undertaken to ameliorate this.

(or more accurately the equipment of tools readiness-to-hand) actively produces space, through shifting valences of readiness-to-hand, corresponding the capacity of objects at their disposal to operate successfully in the transmission and reception of electromagnetic waves. Transposing this again into the language of assemblage, the radio is territorialized, to the extent that its signal is clear, audible and undisturbed; this is a consequence of the various material components within it acting to code the assemblage as such. When this breaks down (is deterritorialized), is when these elements become “loosened” and the homogeneity of the assemblage-its consistency-is reduced. The history of early broadcasting and transmission, then, is as much one of a friction between developing organizational assemblages of engineers and technologies seeking to overcome the phenomenological problems inherent to broadcasting as it was anything else. In order for a successful transmission environment to be maintained, the material assemblage of radio equipment and broadcasting had to be brought into a series of relations with legal and regulatory regimes, some of which had to be formulated from scratch. The contact of material, individuals, organizations and geopolitical exigencies all come to form the radio assemblage in this instance.

What this does, though, is to collide explicitly with Heidegger’s critique of modern society. For Heidegger, the very act of listening to the radio (particularly mass listening) in the manner I have described above would be considered phenomenologically inauthentic, and bound up with the world of “the they”, or “Distantiality, averageness, and levelling down...what we know as ‘publicness’”(Heidegger 1962, 128). I would maintain, though, that the shifting readiness-to-hand of the radio equipment enables the reading I propose above, regardless of the problematic nature of mass society, authenticity and being which mark Heidegger’s critique of technology more generally. A reading of which would pass along the lines of: radio technologies are one way of transforming the air itself into standing reserve, as I will argue in this and later chapters. A mountain (or indeed any topography or environmental feature, weather system) is no longer itself, but enframed in terms of a potential facilitator or disturbance to the passage of radio waves, and Eckersley alludes to this explicitly

“One of the main difficulties in broadcasting is to get rid of extraneous noises (bangs, crackles, hums, whistles, etc.) which are apt to accompany the reception of programmes. Broadcast intelligence is diffused by modulated waves created by a transmitter; the waves form the link between a unique programme source and the scattered listeners. Wireless waves are unfortunately also created and radiate by electrical machinery, such as trams, refrigerators, flashing neon signs, electric motors and so on. These waves, since they cause interference and are not wanted, are called parasitical waves. The audible signals, I mean the nasty noises, created by parasitical waves made by electrical machinery are referred to as ‘man-made static.’...Atmospheric wireless waves are very powerful, they can make noises in sensitive receivers located in England, even though the thunderstorms which create them are taking place in Central Africa. The tropical east and the Gulf of Mexico are also centers of atmospherics.” (Eckersley, 1942: 65)

The material dynamics in which the geography of radio waves was thus imagined, as shifting is clear from Eckersley’s account. So, too was the embodied nature of listening practice:

“It is curious to observe the reactions of ordinary people to loud-speaker listening. Nearly everyone likes the loudspeaker to which he is accustomed and detests anything else. This is because the ear gets drugged by the distortions it constantly hears...The ‘intimate’ microphone technique brings the enlarged voice into a new kind of perspective, the voice has all the character of softness but, owing to the electrical amplification, the reality of loudness’ (Ibid: 110-111)

This is further problematized when we think about what is actually going on within the concept of the “reception” of radio audiences, given that Heidegger and his later interpolators, particularly Graham Harman and Timothy Morton, claim that phenomenological experience even remains withdrawn from itself, as in the case of sound

“(we) never hear the wind in itself: we hear the wind in the chimney, the wind in the trees—and the wind in the harp. Likewise, we don’t hear the sound of the harp in some abstract sense. We hear the wind’s “translation” of the strings. We hear the hollow sound box’s translation of the string’s vibration into amplified pressure waves. Entering our inner ear, these waves are translated by a pressure cell—the one plant cell in the entire human body. This cell acts as a transducer, converting mechanical vibrations into electrochemical signals. And so on.”(Morton, 2013: 206)

These material considerations permeate, then into the legal and institutional assemblages of international political regimes, through Eckersley’s role in the structuring of international wireless regulation. Charged with representing the British

radio interests, he sought to create this agreement through *L'Union Internationale de Radiodiffusion* during the inter-war years, attempting to use a rationalised, geopolitical equation for the measuring of claims to exclusive use of wavelengths “Inspired by logical bases of A (area), B (population) and C (commercial importance or number of telephone calls and telegrams sent Per annum)” (Eckersley, 1942; 89). Their desire to rationally manage and allocate (read distribute according to their prejudices) was, though, frustrated by what they saw as the petty intransigence of other continental European nations. Eckersley, chairing a Conference in Geneva demonstrates a thinly veiled imperial chauvinism well:

“My flow had stopped because I had seen a hand uplifted by a rather shy-looking man sitting half-way down the table.

‘Pleeze Mister the President,’ he said, ‘may I talk pleeze in English?’ and before I could say that I supposed that was what he was doing:

‘Pleeze Mister the president, my country is a very *long* country with many many *beeg* mountains and our wave lengths *pleeze* is a very very *short* wavelengths. And pleeze...’

‘Yes, Yes!’ I replied. ‘I quite understand, but perhaps this rather particular national question could be settled or discussed later; I now want the plan to be considered in its international aspect. As I was saying...’

The little man sat back, looking very miserable. After another ten minutes of my oratory, up went the hand again.

‘Pleeze, my country is a very *long* country,’ he wailed.

‘My country is a very long country,’ became in after years, the slogan to typify those delegates who never came to a conference without a desire ‘to come out with more than in I went.’ The usual method was to air particular grievances to the complete disregard of general interests and hold up all progress until satisfied. The ‘long country’ people were more successful than they should have been because patience is not inexhaustible.”(Ibid, 87)

I quote Eckersley at length because he demonstrates an attitude which will come to typify the “soft” colonial/imperial geography of the air, a geography which I will attempt to explore later in this and subsequent chapters, drawing from other radio archives of from the 1960’s, one in which the material and the discursive are inextricably bound together; the problematic materialities of radio broadcasting and radio listening are evidenced by the forces which press upon the capacity to establish aerial sovereignties, whether they are atmospheric, topographical, political or cultural. In relation to his discursive constructions too, though, Eckersley is, of course, the hero of his own story here; his gaze that of the rational engineer striving above and beyond the querulous, feminised nations of Europe pleading special

interests through appeals to geography. Eckersley only manages to achieve anything when he is introduced to a French Engineer, Braillard to whom he “(t)ook an instant liking, a liking for his quick understanding of technical problems, his flair for the political implications of technical proposals, and above all for his ability to translate technical fact into the language of juridical compromise”(Ibid, 89). In addition to this Eckersley lavishes praise on Braillard for the success of the subsequent Paris conference because Braillard was able to “understand French and the French” (Ibid). He is able, in his eyes, to see in Braillard a man with whom he can work, in contrast to the grasping bureaucrats he has hitherto encountered. Braillard’s Frenchness is no barrier to Eckersley because they share a common worldview: that of the (imperial) engineer. Just as great power conferences were convened to carve out mutually agreed boundaries on appropriated land, so too were the wireless conferences convened to allocate the commons of the spectrum and specific wavelengths to those states with voice and power enough to claim them. This territorialization of the frequency spectrum, though, was to be done with the engineer’s (apparently) dispassionate gaze. The urgency of thwarting the petty bureaucrats is underlined:

“Obviously, said the bureaucrats, no European agreement could possibly become to now and not very likely in the future. We were wasting our time. But meanwhile reception was being ruined. The howls of some lonely station wandering about in the night with no place to go became ever more plaintive, more piercing...I thought it was *a waste of good air* not to try”(Ibid, 88, my emphasis).

The formula was ultimately though, a diplomatic-engineering artifice which bore little relevance to reality as it made no reference to and took no account of the *quality* of wavelengths allocated: “The plan we built on these ‘logical’ bases was very little different from that ordinary ‘technical-compromise’ plan which I tried to get accepted at Geneva”(Ibid, 89). This artifice of compromise constructed by the engineering/diplomatic skill of Braillard and Eckersley thus saved (as they saw it) the nascent *Union Internationale* from the same fate as its geopolitical relative, the League of Nations<sup>15</sup>. It meant that “[t]he jurists were thus satisfied by the mere

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<sup>15</sup> The necessity of the existence of such formulae when devising architectures of geopolitical cooperation has been demonstrated many times since, most notably in the design of the Bretton Woods institutions, where voting quotas were made to seem as scientifically arrived at as possible, and yet were almost entirely reflective of the preferences of the most powerful countries (Stone 2011).

existence of logical bases even if they were not used. Technicians were delighted because a plan could be accepted which prevented the worst interferences.”(90).

The historian of technology Daniel Headrick clarifies this point well:

“Telecommunications technologies are complex and fast changing and play an important part in the political life of nations. Yet they do not spring out of nowhere. While their origin is seldom predictable, their implementation and diffusion result neither from pure technical necessity nor from the rational choices of their inventors or their users. Rather, organizations mediate between the machines and society, influencing both. These organizations—in effect control the flux of interactions between technology and society by purchasing, investing, subsidizing, patenting, sharing or withholding secrets, and many other means.” (Headrick 1991, 8)

The international radiotelegraphy conferences in the inter-war years of which Eckersley was a part provided the first indications of the problems of sovereignty and governance over the invisible fields produced by radio technologies. Despite this there seemed a remarkable degree of agreement over the regulations for transmission of telegraph messages across national boundaries. In terms of international relations theory, such agreements could be attributed to the costs of reneging/backsliding/cheating outweighing those of adhering to international agreements over the terms of trans-European telegraphy regulations. Two key problems for the architects of these regulations were the establishment of fixed costs per letter in telegram communication and the multiple different, competing material sub-species of telegraph machines across the continent. The solution to the former required a distillation of language into a technical assemblage, the type of which had never been seen before (or since). Linguistic communication had, literally, to be re-configured to “fit” into the expanding machine networks crisscrossing physical space in a way that “flattened” local differences in expression and create a standard that could be charged accordingly in multiple places. This process happened relatively late in the development of technologies of communication and supports the view of Thrift & May (2004) that space-time compression, so often identified with the rise of modernity was non-linear, unevenly distributed and non-totalising. The wording of the early telegraph regulations is instructive as to how certain relations of these early technological-linguistic assemblages came into being. For example §8 of the International Telegraph Convention of Saint-Petersburg (1865) stated that

“Combinations or alterations of words contrary to the usage of the language are not allowed; the same rule applies when the combinations or alterations are disguised by reversing the order of the letters or syllables. Nevertheless, the names of towns and

countries, family names belonging to one person, *the full names of places, squares, boulevards, streets and other public ways, names of ships, compound words admitted as such in English and French which can be justified if necessary, whole numbers, fractions, decimal or fractional numbers written in words, may be grouped as a single word.*"

This is the illustration in practice of what was alluded to in the chapter discussing theoretical frameworks, where wireless is read as a techno-cultural assemblage, the essence of the territorializing and deterritorializing facilitated by the material and expressive components of radio being actively coded and decoded by, and through, linguistic assemblage.<sup>16</sup> The international diplomatic-legal structure in the 1920's sought to bind and codify communicative language through machine logic, a complex assemblage of objects, radio waves, legal regimes, scientific-technical discussions and power politics. For language to be *relayed* in this way it is encoded and decoded through these material circuits, and the regulations, conventions and meetings, such as the ones Eckersley recounts are central, and overlooked components of this geopolitics of the air. The next chapter, which focuses more closely on the work done by linguistic coding/decoding within the textual assemblages of radio news, will build further on the above elements. Now, though, I wish to move further onto the second iteration of the radio assemblage in this chapter: how material infrastructures in radio networks such as the BBC come into being, constituted at specific sites, territorializing the radio waves into material-symbolic projections of geopolitical power.

## **5.2 Territorialised networks of transmission (1): The BBC and the Middle Eastern Relay System (MERS)**

Having shown how both juridical and sovereign forces of radio governance regimes of the early twentieth century were found to be matters of symbolic and material complexity, I now turn to a specific illustration of how the imagining, construction, maintenance and decay of a the radio assemblage was manifested during the Cold War period through the BBC's Middle Eastern Relay System (MERS). The establishment and maintenance of radio broadcasting network infrastructures can be

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<sup>16</sup> See also O'Brien (1904, 4) *Machinery and English Style*, where he writes that "While ours is a growing language, it is not a growing code. The telegraph companies forbid their operators to extemporise code words or to use any which are not on a standard list...the wires are thus constantly shrinking the popular vocabulary, hastening the retirement of words of the less useful sort"

seen to work at a variety of different registers, revealing itself (albeit always partially) as a process of material-semiotic complexity. The affective radio power and the soft-cultural diplomacy which the BBC is regularly credited with possessing is, and has almost always been the result of a vast, unseen network of technical and bureaucratic operations which enable and sustain this power, whether these are decisions made which transform radio waves into objects of governance or, conversely whether the material properties of radio transmission act to alter forms of communication themselves. Given what I've said about the *capacities* of objects in the previous section, I now want to expand the discussion to talk about how radio objects, institutions, individuals and ideas might be witnessed in one "moment" in the history of British Broadcasting, producing the radio assemblage within the Cold War context as a popular-geopolitical effect of these components, manifested in the archived material relating to a particular territorialisation of this assemblage in topographical space.

The Middle Eastern Relay System (MERS) was a vital part of the BBC and Diplomatic Wireless Service's strategic apparatus of broadcast to The Arabian Peninsula, parts of North Africa to the West; Iran and Afghanistan to the North, and as Far East as India and Pakistan. The system was conceived initially as a "chain" of stations which would relay BBC programs, from London, via Cyprus to the Middle East and beyond. By the mid 1960's, however, the need for a major program of investment in the technical capacities of the system was apparent, in order that they keep pace with both the BBC's aims as a broadcaster, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's political aims.

In the case of the British Middle Eastern Relay station, moved from Perim, Aden (*Fig .4*) to Masirah, Oman (*Fig.5*) in the Arabian Sea, this manifests itself as a shifting assemblage of institutions, people and matter, tidal currents and weather, diesel generators and bureaucratic meetings, military outposts and anti-colonial affect. This is to say nothing of the thousands of radio sets primed to receive signals at the time, and in the future. The following section is a further attempt to imagine the popular geopolitical spaces of radio in a specific period; spaces producing and productive of the technologies, institutions, individuals and histories composing them. Whilst it does not attempt to trace connections in any systematic way it

focuses on site and objects and concerns its attention to the contexts, processes and interactions of objects and temporalities marking them as radio spaces.



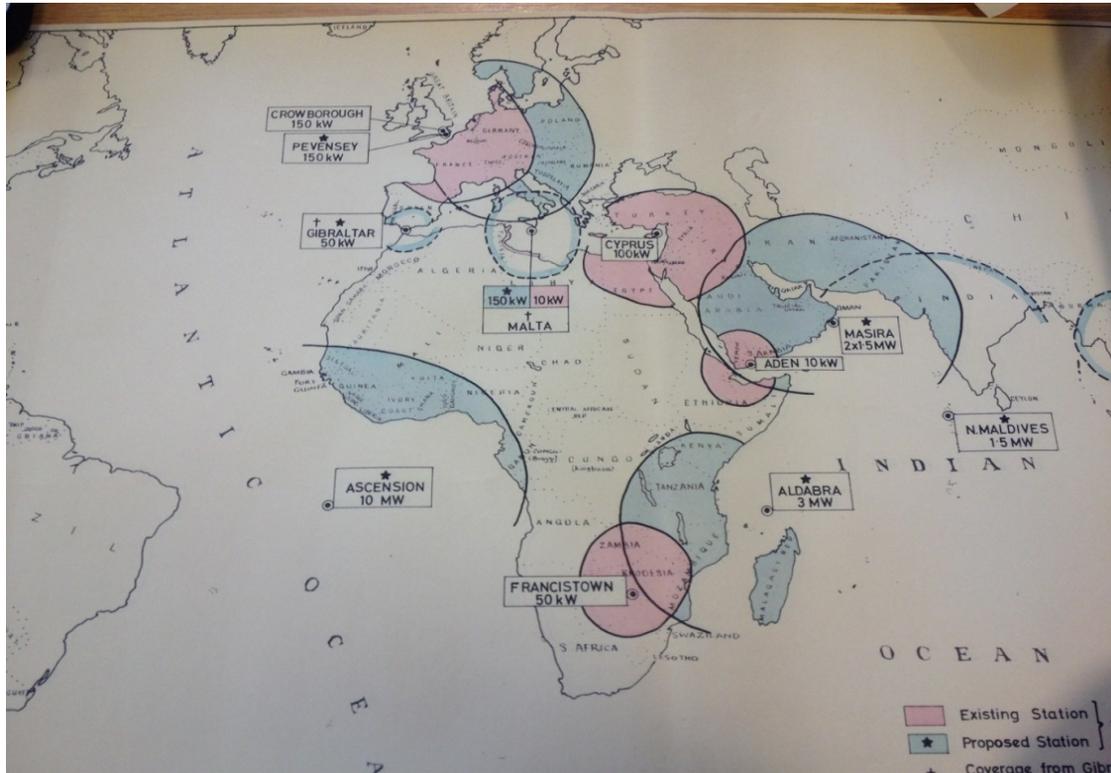
*Fig.4 Perim, Aden (Indicated by marker)*



*Fig.5 Masirah, Oman (Indicated by marker)*

*Fig. 6* shows a wider map held in the engineering section of the BBC’s written archives. It is at the same time a technical, organizational and cultural document, (as, to a general extent are all maps). The cartographic imagination of this kind of mapping is, as discussed earlier on, that of the engineer, where the relevant cartographic legends are radii of projection from various fixed points in space and time, along with other potentialities in the future (i.e. the areas of “planned

coverage”). The medium wave transmissions are broadcasts between 520Khz and 1611kHz and, as the map shows, cannot travel as far (on their own) as shortwave transmissions that “skip” or “bounce” off the ionosphere. Consequently the points on the map are *relay* stations, whereby broadcasts are relayed, in a particular assemblage of objects acting at a distance.



*Fig. 6 BBC External Services Map showing Medium Wave Coverage: Existing and proposed (1967) (WAC. E36/35/1)*<sup>17</sup>

Analysing the map as a text, it is inescapable that the coloured coverage patterns (both existing and planned) belong to the imaginary of colonial outposts and contact zones of the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The arcs of transmission, demarcating the frontiers of coverage were still being pursued in 1967, long after the point at which television was supposed to have supplanted radio’s status as the dominant broadcast

<sup>17</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre (E36/35/1) “**Note:** The Boundaries of Short-Wave coverage shown in red on the Map represent the primary coverage achieved, based on the maintenance of competitive signals of adequate strength, in the wavebands tuned by an average type of short-wave receiver for the major part of the peak listening period. Reception will vary considerably in the red striped secondary areas from almost primary standard to inferior secondary standard with fading noise and interference. Very occasionally primary standards will be achieved in almost all areas” (WAC E36/35/1 (1967))

medium.

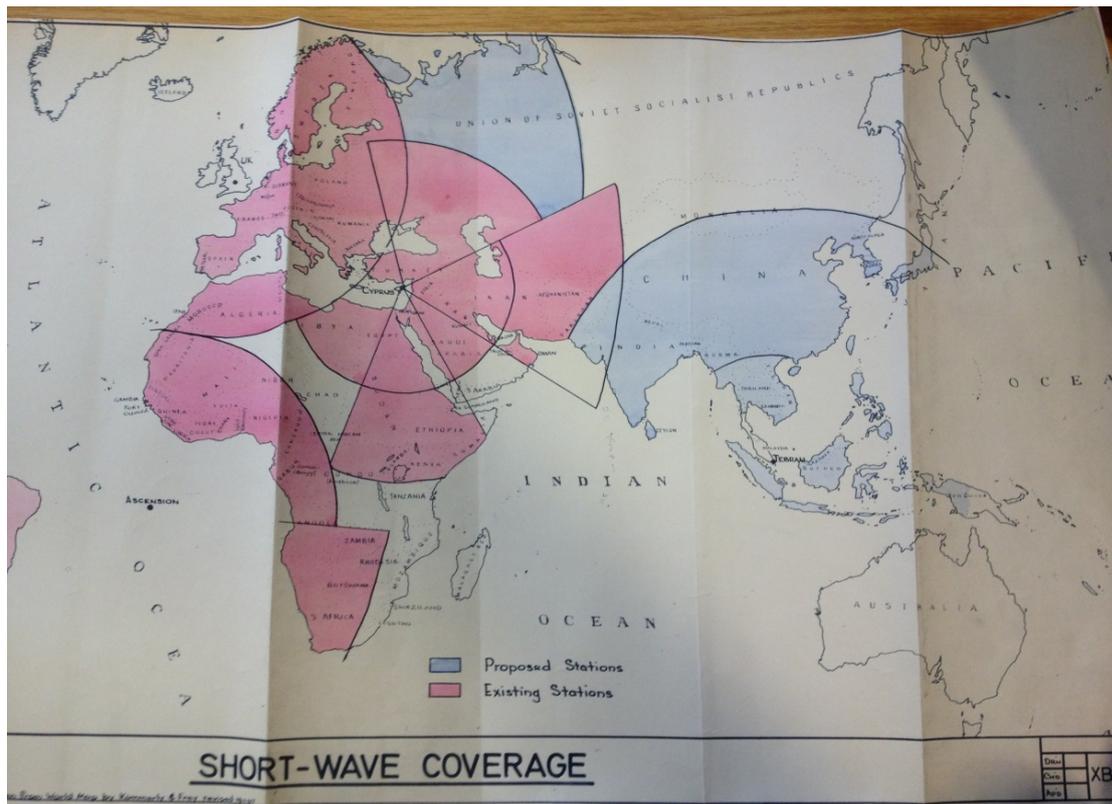


Fig 7. Short-Wave coverage map, existing and planned, 1967(WAC E36/35/1 (1967)

The colonial imaginary at work in *fig. 7* can be said to reflect the anxieties of the early 1960's over de-colonisation, the loss of empire and the desire to retain some, any degree of control and influence. These were all regions of the empire through which in 1960, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had stated, “the winds of change” had been blowing over the previous decade, manifested through the decline of British influence in and control of large areas brought about as a result of national consciousness exploding into full blown independence movements. The coverage maps can be seen as indicative of just one facet of a post-imperial cartography, unintentionally ironic, expressed in the shortwave coverage map which colours areas with the striking pink which are immediately recognisable as the same colouring applied to imperial maps of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century delineating British territories, again refracted by Conrad's colonial imaginary.

“I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that

some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there—fascinating—deadly—like a snake.”(2007,, 27)

Reports from the BBC's external monitoring service (of which more later) in 1968 refer to the vernacular practices of reception experienced by audiences in some of these zones, as opposed to the idealised (colonial) modes of seeing expressed by the cartography above:

“On the UK channels, in contrast the strength of the Ascension Relays in the West, central and South Africa was such that the full extension of the telescopic rod aerial was not always necessary for good reception...Very few of the ordinary listeners could specify the channels they received, the comment being “*The BBC comes up here, here and here and we choose*”. In West Africa, including Brazzaville, the popular tuning points are almost always signals from Ascension – in these areas, particularly in the morning period, it is a matter of tuning through and stopping at the first strong signal which will almost certainly be Ascension”(WAC, letter of March 6<sup>th</sup> 1968 to K. J. Machnoochie from Charlton Higgs (BBC), my emphasis)

Following the proposed “Imperial Chain” which was to be constructed by Marconi's wireless telegraph Co. for the Imperial telegraph service, the relay stations would make audible, broadcasts from London to areas and zones in relative size to their transmitter power (Briggs, *Ibid*: 219)<sup>18</sup>. These maps shift from chains to ranges, overlapping as frequencies became congested. They still operate, though at the traditional (geo) political level of force multiplication and governance: a more powerful transmitter means less licence fee spent, greater distance broadcast and a larger audience reached (captured). The technical discussions, in this sense, are similar to the parallel debates in the 1960's amongst defence intellectuals and military/strategic planners over the maximisation of destructive payloads of nuclear weapons (see Cohn, 1987). Here, then, the actants involved in the generation of the BBC's geopolitical power are both human and material; the geopolitical discourse mobilised in the frequency map and reports could not exist apart from the material agency of the radio waves and equipment implicated in these formations. Crucially, too, both are seen as vital to the geo-strategy in which the BBC is implicated as a part (wholly willing or otherwise) of British Cold War information policy: this is to say

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<sup>18</sup> As Briggs points out, this decisions as to where to situate relay stations in the UK was one similar to the allocation of frequencies internationally, where quantitative demographics (population, area) were placed alongside more nebulous qualities like “civic value” in assessing which cities should get relays.

to utilise the broadcast capacity to the greatest extent possible, maintaining and developing this specifically to maintain influence in the territories of the Empire/Commonwealth whilst similarly, and in parallel, retaining the capacity to broadcast into European, and other areas of Soviet influence.

The idea of family resemblances between broadcast-media technologies and weapons of mass destruction is not made glibly, nor is it claimed as particularly original, as it can be found in the writings of several scholars on technology and media theory<sup>19</sup>. The epigrammatic trope of Marshall McLuhan's thought that "the medium is the message" is regularly recalled to the point of cliché, less well cited though is his later clarification which is if anything more pithy, sinister and revealing: "The content or message of any particular medium," McLuhan said to an interviewer in 1969 "has about as much importance as the stencilling on the casing of an atomic bomb...But the ability to perceive media-induced extensions of man, once the province of the artist, is now being expanded as the new environment of electric information makes possible a new degree of perception and critical awareness by nonartists" (McLuhan 1969, 4). The importance of the MERS as a field of force, in this manner, is underlined in a letter on the subject from F.R.Maginnis of 15<sup>th</sup> November 1965

"We regard this task (the updating of MERS) as an urgent political priority since the BBC Arabic service represents our main information weapon in the Arab world, and the area over which medium wave coverage has been lost (the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf) is at present precisely the most disturbed *and vulnerable part of the target area*" (WAC/ 15h Nov. 1965, emphasis added)

Both broadcast media and nuclear weapons are, then, objects (as well as assemblages) that not only occupy and move in but also actively *produce* space as, in a sense, are all radio objects; an issue which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8. Technological objects-producing-space have been investigated in recent research by Ash (2013), in relation to contemporary digital technologies. The spaces produced by "old" radio technologies demonstrated by the coverage maps in this

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<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps a co-incidence, but an illustrative one, that Samuel Morse's first message sent by that medium: "What hath god wrought?" is reflected in Oppenheimer's quotation of the Baghavad Gita in response to the deployment of nuclear weapons; "I have become death, destroyer of worlds". The association of the technological with the divine is a persistent and central element of the intertext of modernity.

section show that the historical geographies of technologies are replete with the kind of object-oriented *perturbations* Ash and others argue for: “old” technologies were *once*, for want of a better term, “new”, and hence the ideas we apply to our representations of the “new” can be equally translated into previous historical contextures. This, I believe, is one way in which material-discursive assemblages can be most fruitfully employed in the analysis of the media institutions engaged in popular geopolitical representation.

### **5.3 Bureaucratic Assemblages and territorialized networks: Masirah II.**

The primacy of islands such as Masirah to the fields and radii generated in the coverage maps are significant to both the BBC and the DWS. They demonstrate the way in the radio assemblage become territorialized in specific sites, selected for geopolitical and technical reasons. The synthesis of wireless communications and military necessity in the 1960's being such that although distance was now thought in global terms, way stations and stop-off points were still necessary for military aircraft, and transmission stations for radio relays; given that waves travel faster and with less interference over sea than land. This is a fact that again recedes from presence-at-hand to all but those explicitly involved in the “world” of the radio assemblage. Islands in and around the Arabian Sea were from this point of view, strategically important, both for state militaries and organizations. In the broadcast cartography of the imperial chains, radii and projection became primary. Straight lines were replaced by points and zones of reception, flight-times (aircraft and radio wave) were also central to this. Documents in the National Archives relating to Perim, off the coast of Aden and the previous location of the Middle Eastern relay prior to Masirah testify to this. In a report on the strategic importance of Perim, it was noted that despite having no direct strategic importance (it was, after all, microscopic in geopolitical terms), its value was attributed to the potentially negative outcomes of allowing hostile or non-allied powers dominion over it.

“In the case of certain territories it was necessary to retain them, not so much because of the facilities they offered but because of the adverse effect of their acquisition by hostile powers. He (Sir William Oliver) cited as examples Kamaran Island and Perim Island in relation to Aden Colony.”(NA/CO 1015/1646)

Here, though, Oliver seems contradicted by his own logic. This is to say that if the strategic value of seemingly negligible islands resides not in the facilities they offer but of what the effect of allowing others to occupy them is, then surely this entails that these territories give the potential for facilities *worth acquiring*. Such facilities are not defined, but are surely non-human in their dimensions and, not entirely symbolic either. The island appears as having a value not entirely reducible to its component elements (location, soil type, distance from political instability etc...). Thus, whilst certain sets of relations might gain primacy at any given moment, these are not fixed and remain open to fluctuation and change.

Despite the statements discussed earlier showing the importance of the MERS from a foreign policy perspective, the Masirah relay station was not the inevitable outcome of a linear “masterplan” of media/foreign policy management and BBC/Government co-operation. The origins of the updating of the MERS lay in a government commissioned report by Sir Thomas Rapp who, in 1965 recommended the updating of external services broadcasting capacities of both the BBC and the Diplomatic Wireless Service in order to make Britain’s “voice more audible”<sup>20</sup> within the context of the Cold War. Rapp wrote that “[i]n the world at large broadcasting has again advanced at an extraordinary pace since the early 1960’s” and that “[w]hereas five years ago, a 100Kw transmitter was considered very powerful, the accepted power for new transmitters being installed by the BBC as well as its rivals is now 250Kw. Previous studies undertaken in the 1950’s had indicated “[that] overseas broadcasting requires a large investment in technical equipment which makes the cost of overheads relatively high in comparison with what is spent on actual programs.”(FO 953/2236) A subsequent decline in this period was tempered somewhat by modernisation to the relay stations on Cyprus and Berbera and ensured that the Middle Eastern relay system and the BBC Arabic service (which was, it should be remembered the first of the BBC’s foreign language services) remained a strong regional force in the “transmitter war”. The conclusion reached by the External Services division was, however, that “[i]t was only by the establishment of powerful relay stations under our own control that BBC broadcasts could in future

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the problem of “poor audibility” is referenced more in the Rapp report than any other term.

be properly heard in these areas of high priority, where there was a ready audience if only we had the means to capture it.” (FO 953/2236) The tensions in the acceptance of the Rapp report are best thought of as those of organizational components within the radio assemblage which were simultaneously members of many other different assemblages. For example, the BBC, the Foreign Office, the Treasury and the Combined Communications/Electronics committee, were all stakeholders in the process of receiving and implementing Rapp’s recommendations. Rules around “official” communication are to be witnessed in the “turn taking” micro-behaviours of exchanges of letters, minutes of meetings and general rules around collegiality.

The first wave of re-development of the relay system occurred in response to this in the early 1960’s, when four projects, in Cyprus, the Maldives, Sarawak and Ascension Island were proposed, and when the political sensitivities around these re-constructions due to the process of British decolonisation were implicitly acknowledged

“Of these projects only the first has so far been completed. The South Atlantic station on Ascension is expected to be in operation by the end of 1966. The Sarawak and Maldives schemes have not been started due to insuperable political difficulties; because, in fact, the geographical assets we once had for broadcasting from those dependant territories are no longer ours to use...the growth of nationalism and the fear of anything smacking of neo-colonialism render it increasingly difficult to find permanent sites for alternative relay stations”(NA 953/2236)

The importance of these “areas of high priority” are reinforced in the minutes of later BBC discussions with the Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS) about the future of the MERS:

“The complex language pattern through the area, which permits widespread cross listening, on the one hand and the very large potential audience on the other, underlines the need for carefully planned co-ordination in our current affairs output as relayed from Masira (sic), and its close relationship to the political sensitivities and priorities of the area” (G.T.M. de M. Morgan.) (WAC, E36/48/1).

The creation of Masirah II as the solution to the issues raised by the Rapp report is revealed by the archive as something short of intentionality, and can in some ways be narrated as a consequence of non-human objects enacting forces upon each other. Again, in terms of assemblage theory, the “push” and “pull” of coding/decoding can be witnessed within these documents as: “The identity of any

assemblage at any level of scale is always the product of a process (territorialisation and in some cases, coding) and is always precarious, since other processes (deterritorialization and decoding) can destabilize it”(DeLanda, 2006, 28). The attempts at territorialisation (in DeLanda) or, as in Heideggerian “equipmental worlding” are often subverted by other forces, such as the affective power of anti-colonialism, an accidental fire terminally damaging transmitter buildings (see *Fig 8 & Fig.9*) or a bureaucratic wrangle over funding. The materiality of these things is still “live”, albeit decayed, and associations which once composed these trajectories of assemblage remains in these pictures, and the technical reports surrounding them.



*Fig 8 Photograph of failed piston recovered from Deltic generator, Perim Island (National Archives/FO/953/2230)*



*Fig 9 Aerial photograph of fire-damaged transmitter building at MERS Perim Island, 1965 (National Archives/NA/FO953/2230)*

The 1960's were a tumultuous decade for the already destabilised and disintegrating British Empire, and this chapter's discussion of the object-politics of radio transmission geography should be seen firmly in the context of these upheavals, which were as much a part of the North/South "theatre" of the Cold War, in addition to the specific, individual instances of national self-determination. The bureaucratise of the foreign and colonial office documents, and those of the BBC in relation to the relay systems are pregnant with the presence of anti-colonial insurgence in the Middle East and North Africa at the time. In February 1966, as preparations were being made for authorisation for the Masirah project, the DWS pointed out that a 10Kw transmitter, cannibalised from the damaged parts of the station at Perim, which had been substantially damaged in a fire originally thought to be sabotage by insurgents, but later revealed to be a case of technical malfunction. The investigation, by a DWS team sent to Perim and, in consultation with other engineers and political actors in the area revealed that the piston's failure, which ultimately caused the fire, had been observed in a number of other Deltic diesel generators of the same kind, although only in this singular instance had a fire resulted. The executive summary of the findings reads that

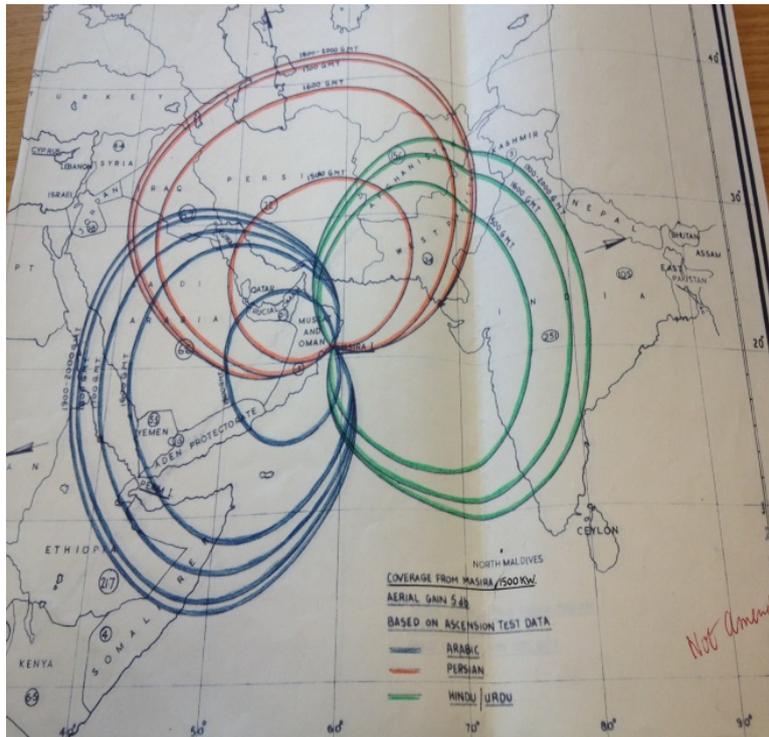
“This fire...first thought to be an act of sabotage, but on closer investigation by the experts, including an expert in sabotage techniques, it was agreed that the fire was caused by the breaking up of a high-powered diesel engine whilst running. This started a chain reaction which caused damage to the extent mentioned above. Although the damage was extensive, the fire burnt itself out before reaching the main units of the high-powered transmitters, which were not badly damaged” (FO 953/2230)

This is important for the ontology of assemblage I am arguing for, because it marks a temporal point where the objects, and “vibrant matter” composing these broadcast infrastructures *could* be discerned from human agency with, in and around them. As Jane Bennett points out in relation to the US East Coast blackout, but which speaks directly to the archival sources above, there are now levels of technological infrastructure where the isolation of causal components in shutdowns/meltdowns is almost impossible:

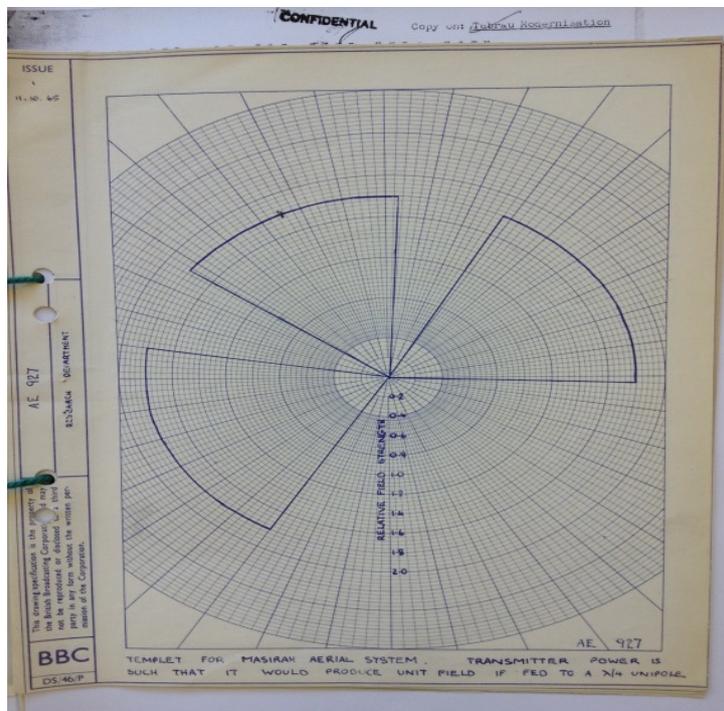
“The electrical power grid...is a material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remaining in sufficient proximity and coordination to produce distinctive effects...its jelling endures alongside energies and factions that fly out from it and disturb it from within...the elements of this assemblage, while they include humans and their (social, legal linguistic) constructions, also include some very active and powerful nonhumans: electrons trees, wind, fire, electromagnetic fields”(Bennett, 2010: 24)

Seeing Bennett’s agentic assemblages alongside the Heideggerian tool-analysis, then, we can see that the shift between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand exists at the level of individual objects, organisations and geopolitical circumstances. The fire brought into sudden presence to managers not only the fragility of the network’s physical infrastructure, but also the proximity and implication of various parts of this to various anti-colonial and insurgent movements in the region. These “levels” (and I hesitate to call them that) are non-heirarchical and correspond only to the relative levels of presence/readiness in any given “disturbance”. That Perim failed seems to exist, in the DWS and technical archive, as an event between a technical malfunction and/or sabotage: the truth never being conclusively established, which speaks to the concerns of socio-material assemblages for the isolating of agency within these formations and how this is often a distributed phenomenon. The existing MERS, then, composed the relay at Cyprus and also the stations Berbera, later moved to Perim and ultimately, Masirah. The BBC and DWS engineering files, once again, retain a cartographic impression of the world within

which the Masirah project was based. They are included as *Fig.10 and Fig.11* below.



*Fig.10 Masirah II coverage plans (WAC E36/711)*

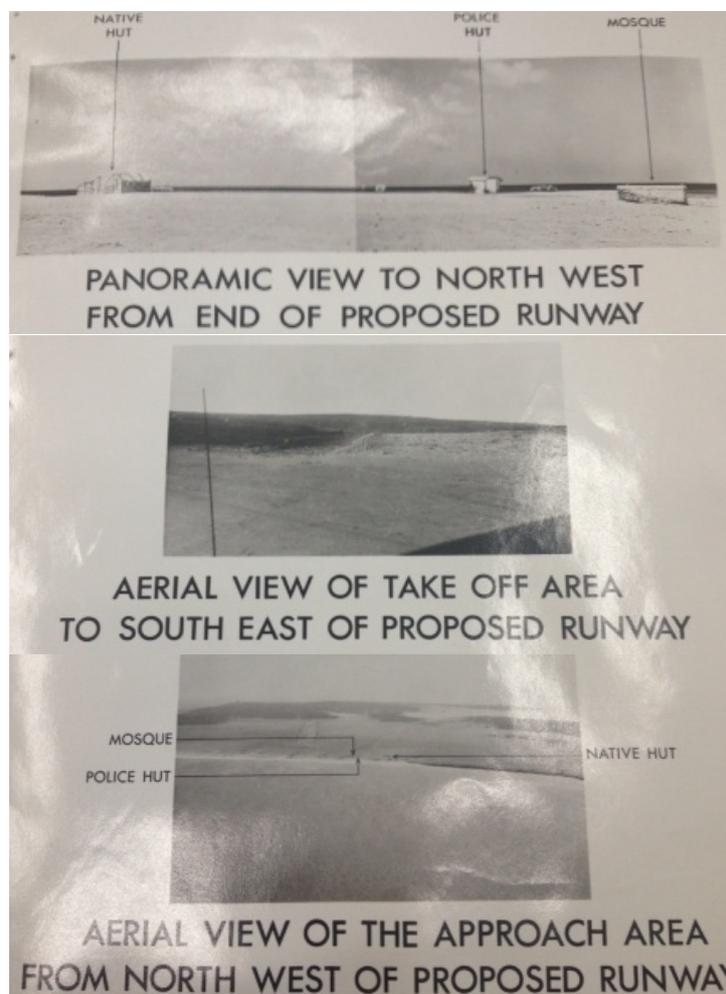


*Fig.11 Masirah II Directional aerial plans (WAC E36/48/1)*

These two diagrams illustrate the geopolitical image-regime Masirah became incorporated into during the 1960's. This is, as in the earlier global map of short wave and medium wave coverage, linked to the shift between the colonial-ethnological and post-colonial engineering gazes discussed in the introduction. Both of these gazes are dependent on shifting connections between and relations to objects, for example the measurement/exploration instruments discussed by Driver (2001) in his analysis of "geography militant". In the case of Masirah, these are objects that *produce* cartographies that *radiate outwards* rather than *inward*. The overlapping cartographies based on linguistic distribution (in *fig 10*) and the exploded view offered by the technical map of the object (aerial) designed to achieve this show the action of objects simultaneously at different geopolitical scales. The relationship to Foucault (and consequently to Heidegger) becomes relevant here, through media archaeology's re-interpretation of the dispersion of power between human and non-human objects in networked assemblage. It is precisely through this I think we can begin to see the possibility of a non-oppositional juxtaposition of the material and the symbolic in the BBC radio assemblage, an attempt to "link between the two...the 'hard' regime of entropic energy consumption and production of not just things but also of material waste; and the immaterial regime of semiotics and signs-what we usually call 'media'" (Parikka 2013, 6). The exchanges of letters and intensive meetings during which the materiality of the Masirah project moved into being took place around the end of 1965, with a view to having the station operational by the middle of 1967. The political questions having been primarily addressed by the Rapp report, which although generally accepted, was still in ministerial council and therefore all of the plans for the Masirah project were still contingent on 1) approval and 2) a decision to decommission the relay at Perim.

Finally, and by way of illustrating further the idea of the "engineers gaze" discussed in the section on Eckersley, and how this feeds into a socio-material construction of space which implicates, variously (neo) colonialism, broadcast technologies and infrastructure, I include the images below in *fig.12*, taken from an information executive site visit to Perim in 1965, just after the fire, with the aim of extending the runway. This triptych can almost be read as an allegory for the kind of British information and foreign policy in the Middle East discussed thus far, identifying, in a

sequence of visual frames and trajectories, the proposed military-geographic value of Masirah as a physical site<sup>21</sup>, in this sense, should be explicitly read alongside the aerial/aerial map in *fig. 11* above. This, as Harman (through Latour) suggests is one way of avoiding both micro and macro-reductionism: through attention to “medium sized objects” rather than undermining, to explain phenomena in terms of particles, atoms etc... or overmining: explaining at the level of super-structures such as power or language (Harman, 2011). Assemblage, I believe, provides precisely this kind of theoretical bridge (if this is not to mix metaphors too much) as it scales entities purely through their relational capacities of/to *other* entities.



*Fig. 12 Low level aerial photographs for proposed RAF landing strip, Masirah Island (FO 953/2230)*

<sup>21</sup> The only three markings on the map being the “Police Hut”, “Native Hut” and “Mosque”, only adds an extra layer of symbolic partitioning to this text. Further to this, the island is similarly reduced to the *Bestand* of Heidegger’s technological orientation to the world, with the island reduced to a stockpile of instrumental qualities in addition to its radio conductivity.

#### 5.4 Instrumentation, Assemblage and Trace: Network afterlives.

As discussed in the introduction, the technology of broadcast media is made possible through the instrumentation of the electromagnetic spectrum, which the archive reveals to us as manifested at a variety of sites, territories and institutions. The spectrum is a *natural* phenomenon, existing independent of any human action upon it. The broadcast network, then is the *event* of interface between instrumental rationality and an object, or system of objects, whether they are natural (as in the spectrum) or human-built (as in the valves, tubes and masts required to translate it). It is the *excess* Graham Harman argues for in his reading of Heidegger's tool analysis: namely that the apparently relational nature of readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) of objects is unsustainable as when they "break" or otherwise "intrude" this demonstrates their irreducibility to a functioning part within a unified system. (Harman 2009, 4). This is, of course, to skip over, for the moment, Heidegger's view that technology as such acts to "strip all mystery from the world and reduce everything to stockpiled presence-at-hand"(Ibid, 5)

What is important here, too, though, is that the archives also show is the *remnant-being* of these technologies and infrastructures. The view of assemblage argued for in the theoretical framework emphasised the need to retain the historical capacities of relational thought as against some variants of new materialism which have an over-focus on the present. One reason why this project is limited in respect of what it can hope to achieve is that broadcast radio waves themselves are not stored anywhere for posterity; that is that there is a limit to how one can archive/excavate or otherwise re-constitute any given wave assemblage. In a recent radio documentary on the history of modernism, as discussed in the chapter on Methods, various imaginary strategies have been proposed for dealing with the ambiguous archive of radio, including "imaginary" or "impossible" media such as Will Self's "Ethermatic Remitter" , which may initially seem to stray into the realms of whimsical, post-

modernist contrivances employed to entertain audiences but are precisely the kind of devices which can assist us in thinking about technologies in different ways.

What is left, then, of a radio broadcast networks when recordings do not remain? It seems to vanish into the air in the moment in which it is transmitted. The archaeology we have hitherto conducted has been of the historical kind, digging up the archival remains of how the relay system on Masirah came into technological-being, and what this being-in and being-with constituted during the 1960's. What came after this though? The relay system itself is long since decommissioned, shut in the 1980's as a result of a similar program of efficiency, reach and practicality reports that brought it into existence. The site itself, as *fig.13* shows, has fallen into ruin.



*Fig.13 Ruins of Masirah relay station c.2007 (image credit: John Haig)*

As Parikka also writes of the ongoing, leftover materiality of media:

“After their use value is exhausted, they become things of a different sort. Of course, abandoned and obsolete media technologies are not always just abandoned, but participate in another process—one that is often as complex and multiple as the one involving processing information, the way it happens with microchip based media” (Ibid, 3, also Gabrys 2011).

The relay station at Masirah came about partially as a consequence of bureaucratic organisation, but also partly because of the fire that severely damaged the transmission facilities on the existing MERS station at Perim. In 1977 a cyclone ripped apart large sections of the relay station, although the main transmitters remained standing. Although the damaged components were ultimately repaired, the relay station at Masirah was decommissioned in the 1980's. The site of the station has decayed and is now a dedicated bird sanctuary home to oystercatchers, sand plovers and turnstones. The archived materials, though, particularly ones held in the National Archives under the RAF records linked to Masirah push the story in a different direction, particularly regarding the island's history as a point of communication. What this reveals is both an older and newer history of communication in the island space that predates and continues after the existence of MERS there.

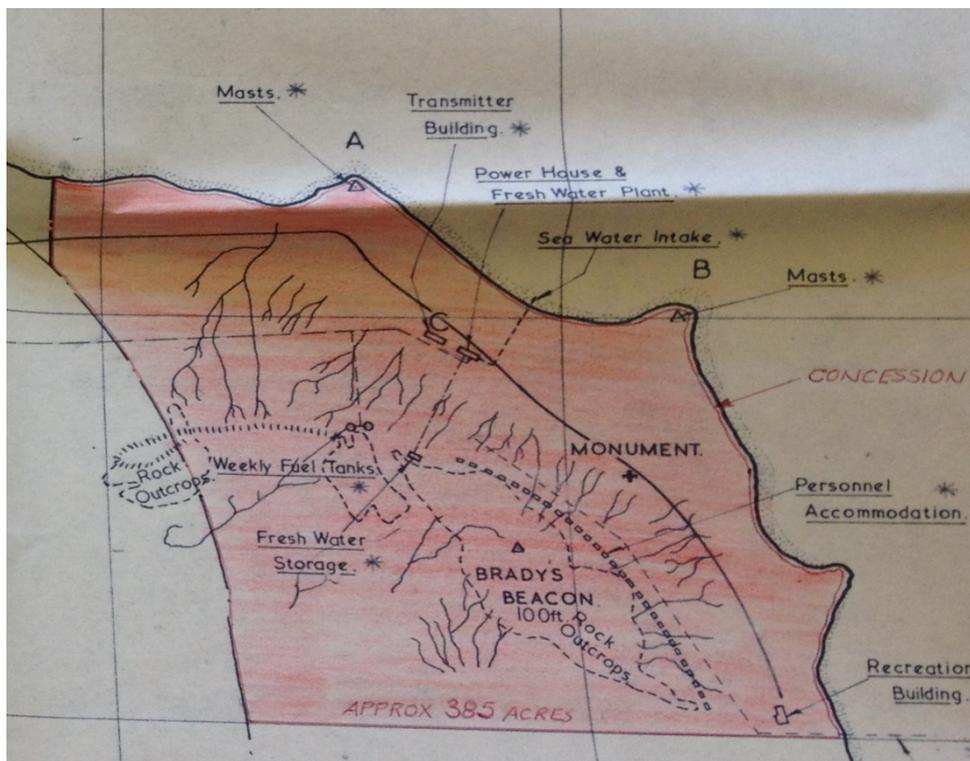
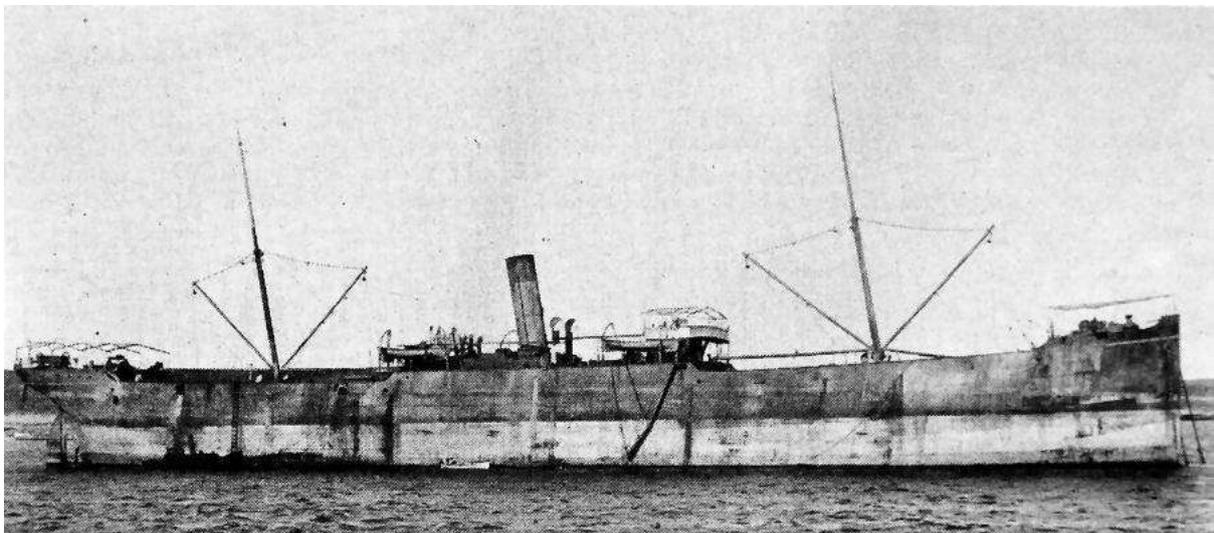


Fig.14 Masirah Relief Map for BBC MERS Planned Project 1967. (WAC E36/27/1)

Earlier in the twentieth century, *The Baron Innerdale*, a three thousand ton steamer of Hugh Hogarth & Sons, Glasgow was four days out of Karachi, bound for London with a mixture of grain and timber when she was caught in the South West monsoon and ran aground on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1904, around the Kuria Muria island group off the South East of Omani coastline. Wireless communication was still in its laboratory stages and years from being available to ships. The best that could be done was to await rescue from a passing vessel and, although the *Baron Innerdale* was in no danger of sinking, the Captain took one of the ships lifeboats and twenty-one members of the crew (leaving a skeleton of 10 or so behind) and set out North, following the coast. It is presumed that he did this in order to hasten the process of rescue by intercepting ships on the busier shipping lanes. Some days after they left, another steamer, the SS Prome passed by and sighted the Baron Innerdale, relieving some of its crew. Informed of the status of the Captain and the rest of the crew, the steamer SS Dalhousie went in search of them.



*Fig.15 SS Baron Innerdale* (Photograph: Colin Murray)

The lifeboat had landed, whether by design or imperative on the Northern tip of Masirah and in the course of their contact with the local Arabs a pistol had been fired by one of the crew. The subsequent skirmish left twenty one of the crew dead, their bodies then buried in the sand near Ra's Qudifah. The only survivor was a cabin

boy, picked up by the Dalhousie some time later. The Sultan punished the alleged ringleaders, and many were put to death and buried alongside, or near to the crew. The Baron Innerdale was refloated and repaired, only to sink ten years later on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1914 after a collision with the SS African Monarch in the Red Sea, 3000km from where it first ran aground. A memorial to the men constructed by RAF personnel in 1942 is mis-inscribed to the “Baron Inverdale” and stands some five hundred meters from the transmitter building.



*Fig 16. Monument to sailors from the Baron Innderdale killed on Masirah c.2007 (Image Credit, John Haig)*

What do we learn from these historical fragments of Masirah? Moreover, how do such a series of archival narratives bring us closer to understanding the archive of radio-communication technologies as historical assemblages in their own rights, constantly constituting and constituted by their contact with other actors? Visually all that remains are a series of tourist photographs plucked from holidays to the Island

(see *Fig.16*). The plans, correspondence and meeting minutes held within the archives no longer relate to an existing structure. Archived architectural plans often fall into one of two categories; either they are the historical record of a time *before* a given, continuously existing structure or they are all that remains of it, in the sense of a being *complete*. Literature on the island is sparse to say the least, peppered (and as demonstrated above, often inaccurate) entries in regional travel guides, the island emerges now, coded primarily as a site of wildlife and water-sports tourism (Carty 2010). Activities, it should be remembered, which are also dependent on currents and waves, albeit of a different material order.

The contemporaneous emergence of radio and modernism was met with an anxiety over the physicality and threat posed by the invisible fields by which people found themselves increasingly surrounded, through which they increasingly found themselves compelled to live, work and move<sup>22</sup>. The literature of and around modernism is often pervaded by notions of the “buzz”, “hum” and “crackle” in the atmosphere (material *and* cultural) of the early twentieth century (Marvin 1990). One is thus tempted by Masirah, however clichéd, to recall Caliban’s statement in *The Tempest* that “the isle is full of noises”; waves were drawn into it, concentrated through the marshalling/martialling of material, the installation of elements of modernity, albeit elements were not self-sustaining; signals and currents at the level of the material and symbolic circulated through, around and within Masirah, corresponding to variant geopolitical exigencies, priorities and demands. The original RAF airbase required thousands of four-gallon cans of fuel to serve its purpose as a re-fuelling stop for heavy bombers during the Second World War. The cans were subsequently integrated into the architecture of the island as local inhabitants used them to build small homes. One veteran’s account for a public archive project run by the BBC explains:

“Only wireless and aircraft linked Masirah with its Aden based nearly a thousand miles away. When the first RAF detachment arrived, building was the first problem. Every item of material to erect living accommodation, stores, offices, workshops had to be brought in by ship. If a handle or hinges were forgotten it might mean months of delay before a door could be fitted. However, a further problem brought a solution to the first; aviation fuel came in four gallon tins, as it took 270 tins to fuel a Wellington aircraft for its 9 hour operational flight, soon thousands of empty tins had

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<sup>22</sup> See Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (2000), also Deborah Dixon, ‘I hear dead people: Science, technology and a resonant universe’ in *Social and Cultural Geography* 8. 5 (2007)

accumulated on the island. Then someone had a bright idea and a remarkable and unique form of architecture was born. Tins were filled with sand and laid like bricks on a three inch concrete foundation; the tin roofs were covering with plastering of sand and cement. So Masirah became Petrol Tin Island.”(Proctor 2013)

The myth that the *Baron Innerdale* incident had led to the sultanate forbidding native islanders to construct permanent structures in which to live was given further credence by the creation of these petrol-can dwellings. The *Baron Innerdale* ran aground because of poor visibility in the time of a monsoon. A lack of communication, though, was what led to the deaths of most of its crew. A lack of technological capacity to communicate which would have made the Captain’s expedition redundant and, we must assume, an ultimate failure to communicate with Others in the colonial “contact zone” of the beach at Masirah.

The afterlife of these events underscores an irony: Masirah became defined, almost entirely, by its potential as a site *of* or *enabling* communication. The Middle Eastern Relay was, as the records demonstrate, an important component in the process of globalising the “voice” of British broadcasting. It occurred around the time that several departments within the BBC were being either merged or expanded, with External Services being renamed as World Service in 1965. What could *speak* within and what could be *heard* from Masirah had switched places.

Documents from the archive of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the National Archives reveal an attempt to produce a history of the base at Masirah. This report contains perhaps the most comprehensive ecology of the Island. Almost Linnean in its detailed cataloguing of flora, fauna, geology and topography it was prepared by Squadron Leader C. Russ. Chrisp around September 1974. Its addressee was Squadron Leader M John Maynard, who was stationed on the Island. In his reply on receipt of the history he remarks “(that) life at Masirah is so transitory that something like this has been needed to provide a sense of continuity.”(NA/AIR 23/6634). Transitoryness is another essential property of modern communication, either through the ability to facilitate, transform (as in electricity) or to trans(m)it physical matter. However, it is the existence of another, parallel American airbase on

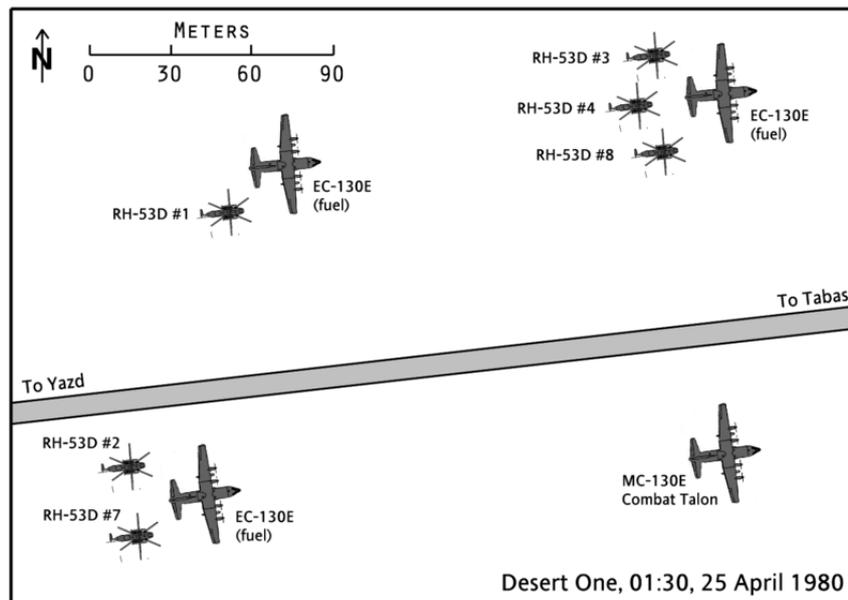
Masirah that adds to these stories a geopolitical coda of further significance. In 2006 Ambassador Edward S. Walker gave the following testimony to the US Senate:

“Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the strategic importance of Oman to the United States and the part the Free Trade Area agreement might play in that relationship. In 321 AD, Admiral Nearchos, commanding the fleet of Alexander the Great, identified the Island of Serepsis, now Masirah in Oman, as a strategic port for securing trading routes in the Gulf region. Oman is no less important today. Its geographic position with a coast line of 1700 kilometers (approximately 1056 miles) facing outward toward the Indian Ocean, its access point to the Persian Gulf, and its share, with Iran, of guardianship over the Strait of Hormuz controlling access to the Persian Gulf makes Oman a particularly important location for protecting American interests. Twenty per-cent of the world’s oil is shipped through the Strait of Hormuz”<sup>23</sup>

This statement relays the diplomatic trope of uniting great spans of historical time within a frame of US regional interest. This is a consistent practice of US diplomatic language towards perceived allies and partners. The US relationship with Masirah, unburdened by the British colonial past has borne a certain degree of fruit. In 1979 the Island was used as a staging ground for planes taking part in *Operation Eagle Claw* - the disastrous mission to rescue American hostages held following the siege of the US embassy in Tehran. The planes set off from Masirah to a desert landing in Iran (the only component of the mission to be executed successfully). A cold down draft in a desert storm churned up a large wall of silt and other debris into the air. It was this *Haboob*, common to the region, which damaged, forced back or delayed the remainder of the mission. In the aftermath of the subsequent debacle, the planes returned to Masirah, carrying, amongst other cargo, eight dead Americans who were killed when their helicopter caught fire while attempting to re-fuel in the desert.

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<sup>23</sup> Testimony of Ambassador Edward S. Walker Jr. to the Senate committee on Finance International Trade Subcommittee, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2006.



*Fig.17 Representation of phase 2 of Operation Eagle Claw.*

What I hope this section has illustrated is at least a degree of the reflexivity which must come with assemblage research (and perhaps some of its difficulties). If we are to write about popular geopolitical assemblages such as radio, the relations in which its components stand to other objects quickly multiply, especially if we accept that “all objects are equal”, or a version of flat ontology, and derive power only by virtue of the strength or vitality of their connections. This kind of position means that in the context of archival research, relations are not bound by particular times and often multiply exponentially. This is appropriate, given DeLanda’s frequent shifting into the valences of genetic and phylogenetic, particularly in his earlier work on assemblage. The above, as a relational trail or network, is of a small, isolated island and yet contains within it a vast network of geopolitical and communication histories, objects, narratives and incidents. Mapping this is challenging, but also reflects the unstable nature of things which, whilst appearing solid or ossified (physical landmasses, obsolete communications systems) are “beneath the surface” constantly reacting with the shifting, the unresolved and restless static of being; being which encompasses the material and the ideological, physical and conceptual; the past the present and the future all existing simultaneously.

## 5.5 Radio Sets, Listeners and Diplomatic Bags: BBC Signal Monitoring assemblages

*“We have set great store by the monitoring operation which involves some 250 data sources, of which a significant proportion are our own Posts, thanks to the C.B. officers’ voluntary efforts. It is a highly complex computerised operation, and both we and the BBC depend on its existence for knowing whether the optimum frequencies are being used to make the programmes audible. Without regular signal monitoring from a great many sources each week, BBC transmission engineers are working in the dark.” (K.J. Macnochie, Information Administration Department, FCO, November 1970)*

Having shown in the previous section how the archive can be employed to animate, but never completely encompass the historical, institutional and technical trajectories of the radio assemblage, the concluding section of this chapter will involve further attempts to “think” and “write” the spectrum and its attendant objects historically, through a close reading of a section of the BBC’s archive which concerned itself with the monitoring of signal fidelity throughout the world. Such a practice, it should be clear, once more is deeply implicated in the capacity of radio and the attempts by BBC broadcast technicians to “close” the world, or to gain as much knowledge as possible as to both the extension and quality of the broadcasts transmitted by the BBC worldwide.

BBC Monitoring was never a value-neutral section of the corporation, its history being such that it was co-opted to produce black propaganda during the Second World War. In the post-war years it became accommodated into the radio infrastructure as what might be thought of as an intelligence service for “soft power” elements of foreign information policy. Soft Power is, perhaps along with Said’s Orientalism, one of the central ideas underlying contemporary discussions of popular geopolitics. Since Joseph Nye’s (2004) seminal, if crass and over-simplified text codifying the main elements of (American) soft power, the concept has begun to infiltrate mainstream, non-academic political discourses. Briefly, the concept relies on an assumption that power is exercised in international politics not only through “hard” or military methods, materials and strategies. Instead, it is supposed, states or groups of states can project influence through the appeal of socio-cultural texts, images, products (Nye 2004). Indeed, in Alistair Pinkerton’s research on radio geopolitics, he identifies soft power as one of the fundamental institutional logics

behind the BBC's "voice around the world", and my research above into the Rapp report and the MERS explicitly bears this out also. Signal monitoring was particularly important in the context of the Cold War for the BBC as it not only established the quality and fidelity signals in order to avoid unintentional interruptions to service, but also could help to identify when, where and how intentional disruption due to signal jamming conducted by foreign powers might be taking place. In the following sections, then, I want to take the idea of soft power and explore further the ideas of an object-oriented popular geopolitics I have begun to argue for above. I intend to do this through a reading of one particular "incident" accounted in the files of the BBC's external services archive, relating to the technical aspects of BBC Listener monitoring at the height of the Cold War. Ultimately, I will argue that what this exemplifies is a little-discussed semi-clandestine aspect of soft power, with an intensive engagement between objects, individuals, institutions and legal regimes across land and aerial borders.

Listener monitoring was understood and managed during the 1960's and 70's as primarily an exercise in testing signal strength and fidelity. The receivers like the one issued to an Austrian private citizen and volunteer monitor, Kurt Huber were despatched around the world to monitors to test and report to British diplomatic missions on the quality of BBC signal strength at various times. This data could then be used by External Services to establish where BBC radio was being received, at what effectiveness and consequently to make decisions about how best to increase this through technical or bureaucratic innovations. This relates to the problem of "audibility" which came to define the organizational problematic of the BBC/Foreign Office during the mid-late 1960's. The monitoring service files reveal a global distribution of "listeners", often provided with sets by the BBC, employed or volunteers, sometimes working out of British diplomatic missions, sometimes from their private residences. The archive reveals the extent of the operation by 1975,

and is visualised on the map below at *fig.18*



*Fig. 18 Signal Monitoring participation by Embassy, 1975 mapped by the author from (BBC/WAC E36)*

These mappings can be seen in light of the physical and human geographies of the Cold War period. These interactions between the discursive power of BBC broadcasting and the material infrastructures required to sustain it are found in concerns about the potential for jamming of broadcasts by the USSR and other communist bloc countries, born out explicitly by BBC memos of the time:

“What the BBC is anticipating is an attempt by the Russians to interfere not only with the broadcasts to Russia but also with those to the other Communist bloc countries and to Yugoslavia as well. This they may effect by strategic siting of transmitters where they can foul up both the ground-wave and the sky-wave of several frequencies at a time”(letter from K.J. Maconochie to Charlton Higgs BBC External Services, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1968) BBC WAC, emphasis in original

The difficulty of maintaining a working assemblage of human and material monitoring coverage is seen to continue into the early 1970's, where BBC is informed that "THE GAPS" (i.e. the gaps in which listener-monitors were not currently operating) could not be filled by the allocation of resources for paid staff arranged through diplomatic missions, further showing the BBC's liminal situation as a quasi governmental organization belonging to public service and diplomatic assemblages simultaneously.

"I take your point that our own Communications Branch officers are, where they are prepared to volunteer, doing a good job for our joint good. Equally, as you say, there is no scope for a paid monitor at any place where we have a communications officer...However, I note that there are certainly gaps in coverage, some small such as I myself have filled in the past quarter-century and some perhaps of more importance in those areas where we have now DWS<sup>24</sup> personnel available to approach (e.g. the whole Western hemisphere other than Havana). Could we please have an agreed list of such major gaps, with the idea of asking colleagues in the various Embassies and consular posts what they might undertake?" (Letter from F. Sedgwick-Jell, Information department assistant, to Charlton Higgs, BBC External Services, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1972: BBC WAC, emphasis in original)

BEXBS engaged in an attempt to close, or contain and perfect their technique, through the creation and engagement of other actors, amateurs, as opposed to *professionals* back in London. The data transmitted was no longer of the nature of animal or human or anthropological or naturalistic registers, but rather data of the air, the quality of broadcast frequencies, of the *fidelity* of a signal. This is demonstrative of what Latour has referred to as "inscription devices" in the context of laboratories and scientific controversy. These devices are hybrid interfaces of human and non-human, individual and technology. Writing of the process of observing data from a laboratory physiography, Latour says that "[w]e are at the junction of two worlds: a paper world that we have just left, and one of instruments that we are just entering. A hybrid is produced at the interface: a raw image, to be used later in an article, that is emerging from an instrument" (Latour 1987, 65). Where-else is this more clearly demonstrated than in the vigil of the monitor's as accounted in the archive, a lonely assemblage of thermionic valves, antenna, broadcast waves and human cochlea, receiving and sending back reports on fidelity, assurances of audibility. One example of an exchange within DWS/BBC monitoring management concerns the lack of monitoring from New Delhi: "It is disappointing this post is not responsive because it is, as you appreciate...one of the blind spots and any monitoring activities

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<sup>24</sup> Diplomatic Wireless Service

would be of mutual advantage” (BBC WAC,12/2/1967). Similarly, another report back to London from the High Commission in Lagos illustrates the nested sets of materials acting on the technological and human components of the assemblage. Reporting that on monitoring broadcasts from the new relay station at Ascension Island:

“There seems to be some extra background noise interpolated...My listening is done mainly in the evening and while the signal-in the 19 metre band- is very much stronger and more easily picked up than was previously the case, I share the view that there is a good deal of background noise. I suspect that this is due to the siting of transmitters on the wrong kind of subsoil – but that may be the only subsoil there is on Ascension Island. We are very pleased to hear from the BBC that the Atlantic relay is coming into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> April. This, we hope, in light of our recent experience, will enable the BBC to compete on equal terms with VOA (Voice of America), Deutsche Welle and other stations but we will check and report”(Letter from D.D Condon, British High Commission, Lagos to R H Young, Joint Information Administration Department, London, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1967 WAC, E36/41)

The success of the: Island Relay was far from uniform across Africa, though, with the High Commission in Zambia reporting that

“I personally have had little success so far in picking up the Ascension Island Relay and Michael Kittermaster informs me that the Radio Zambia engineers, with all their sophisticated equipment, have experienced great difficulty in obtaining a worthwhile signal. Their verdict in fact is that at the moment it is certainly no better than Cyprus at a time of year when local reception conditions are reasonably good”(From F.D Symington, Lusaka, Zambia to S.E. Watrous, Head of African Service, BBC, London, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1967, WAC, E36/41)

At this moment then, prior to the ubiquitous (but not total) connectivity which marks the geography of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century information age but coming after the fears and anxiety and “strangeness” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the popular geopolitical equivalent of Latour’s “centres of calculation” and “inscription machines” can be seen through a materialist reading of these micro-infrastructures of the radio assemblage. Whilst some work in popular geopolitics has sought to show the socio-material nature of institutions-producing-representations (e.g. Muller, 2012), my argument here is that these insights can equally be directed to historical, as well as contemporary circumstances.

Due to costs the push back from the Foreign Office and central government was that the BBC should either “do this themselves” (i.e. find willing, unpaid amateurs) or rely on the time of existing communications officers at British Embassies. For obvious reasons, this implies a certain structural conflict between a public service (but not state) broadcaster and a government department. Not the first, to be sure, but one of many evolving “controversies” to place this in Latour’s language, between individuals, knowledges, contexts and technologies, none of which ever seemed to gain primacy. The discussions over the necessity of the reclamation of import taxes regarding a radio receiver sent to a BBC monitor in Vienna, as I will illustrate below, is one particularly appropriate microcosm of this development of function and dis-function.

Whenever organisations are presented with problems which cross (geo) political boundaries, often a number of other actants emerge to challenge, ally or oppose their desires or preferences. Reflecting back on the previous chapter and overlaying some of its considerations with this, the 1970’s was one of the less acute periods of Cold War, geopolitical anxiety amongst Western and Soviet and non-aligned governments and organisations, the European Union was expanding and ready to embrace the United Kingdom under its auspices. However the reality of shifting, physically, objects across (geo) political lines is evident from this series of letters. A situation far too often elided, overlooked or unacknowledged in popular geopolitics is that whilst texts may be shifted and seem to defy all attempts to exclude them, the material, physical objects (especially those coming to produce/conduct the texts themselves) are often engaged in intense bureaucratic battles to ensure their passage to sites in which they can function (to the satisfaction of their despatchers).

Popular geopolitics often talks of texts as if they overcome geographic boundaries by pure osmosis, unstoppable carriers of signs (Barthes 1983). A satellite transmitter *does* beam to any space on earth (subject to the specificities of its particular geo-orbit), a radio, when tuned *will* pick up any signal which is not jammed. The case I wish to make is that this has not always been so, that there is a far deeper, far more understated history to the construction and passage of popular geopolitical technologies which recent scholarship takes for granted. There is an entire

operation of systems, objects and people which take place both prior to and simultaneously with the production of representations which, nevertheless, contain their own politics, history and regimes of meaning.

What these series of documents held in the archive, released subject to request reveals, I wish to argue, is how their very uncontroversial nature, their very banality, the very frustrations with which these nameless, now named, long dead yet re-animated bureaucratic actors can be identified within these texts serves itself to animate the archive, to re-constitute objects which were never dead in themselves, but only construed as such by a continuing anthropic tendency in technology studies, that a technology, once obsolete, *ceases to exist*; a tendency which, if followed through, would consign the millions of VHS players still in circulation, the billions of cassette tapes, an entire analogue culture to an ontological void; *These objects do not stop existing just because we improve on them* (See Brabazon 2013; Parikka 2013).

This is, of course, also a story of the emergence of the synthesis between human and technology, and one I intend to explore in the next section, when a further series of letters from the BBC External Broadcasting Services (BEXBS) will demonstrate the growingly irrevocable relationships between centres of wave reception, persons and radio receivers which came to compose these circuits. The BBC was learning its trade, was learning not only how to broadcast to the world but how to ensure that they had every possible asset to hand to assure the quality of these broadcasts. Soft power in popular geopolitics is often spoken of in terms of representations, symbols and institutions. This reminds us, that they are also, vast physical networks with their own circuitry, objects and interactions, not reducible to one or the other. This is why the (political) geography of radio waves is an apt way of thinking about networked (popular) geopolitics.

Having contextualised the importance of the monitoring project to the organizational dynamics of the BBC during the Cold War ecology of the late 1960's & early 1970's, I will now illustrate this with a more concrete example from the BBC's archive relating to the necessity of the reclamation of import taxes regarding a radio receiver sent

Vienna, Austria, as an appropriate illustration of how the semi-official actor-network of listener monitoring functioned within the context of this period of the Cold War.

Kurt Huber's existence only comes to light from a series of letters discovered over the course of this research, sent between the BBC, the Diplomatic Wireless Service and the Foreign Office in 1968. They relate to the possibility of obtaining an import tax rebate for a wireless receiver, which was despatched to Herr Huber some four years earlier in order for him to carry out his monitoring work. To be clear, it is not suggested that he was in any way operating in the "normal" clandestine ecology of the Cold War. He was no Harry Lime, Graham Greene's dubious black marketer, much less a spy. He had no explicit access to confidential or sensitive information and his work within the US embassy was in a capacity no greater than a freelance translator. However, the very fact of his access to and work with embassies, perhaps the most sensitive of all Cold War sites, and his implication in a network of objects and political/media institutions in Vienna at the height of the Cold War makes the sensitivities around the affair more marked.

The new receiver, sent to replace Huber's existing set, precipitated the "object affair" between the embassy, the DWS and the foreign office, each with a separate set of relations to the set, to Huber, to the financial imperatives of monitoring policy and diplomatic relations. On 14<sup>th</sup> December K. J. Machonochie of the Commonwealth Office wrote to enquire as to whether import duties on the original receiver could be reclaimed as part of the sequence of sending the new set from the DWS. It identifies Huber as a "locally engaged technical reporter" but, crucially, remarks (that) "there is always, perhaps a complication in that the monitor may, for reasons of his own, be reluctant to let his name be known. Also it may be hard to convince the customs authorities that a mistake was made in sending the set directly to the monitor instead of to his place of work: the Embassy" (WAC, 36/41).



Fig.19 BRT 400 (The “old” Receiver), photograph, creative commons licence



Fig.20 Nordmende Globetrotter Receiver (The “new” receiver) photograph, creative commons licence

This is telling in its own right, to the degree of sensitivity afforded to certain objects in certain spatial and temporal contexts. That being in possession of a radio receiver for monitoring BBC broadcasts should present its own challenges of explanation and organizational affiliation in Vienna, in the 1960’s shows that (Euclidian) spatial proximity to an object, as the Heideggerian tool-analysis suggests, is only one way of reading relations of distance, only one *face* of the object system, displaying itself at any given temporal moment. This contingency is often tacitly endorsed in critical international relations theory<sup>25</sup>, and is re-stated here as a central component of object-geopolitics.

<sup>25</sup> As in the social constructivist argument surrounding the “meaning” of possession of WMD being dependent on intentions, rather than proximity alone.

The British Embassy in Vienna wrote back to Maconochie, suggesting that the use of the diplomatic bag for the transportation of the radio set, suggested by Maconochie to avoid its entering into the customs system, was a dubious proposition:

“Equipment sent to the Embassy under diplomatic privilege should be for the use of the Embassy or for the personal use of staff on the Diplomatic List...It’s doubtful whether these terms cover the uses to which this radio receiver was put and they certainly do not cover the individual who is not on the staff of this embassy at all...Checking BBC reception cannot be regarded as official as far as this embassy is concerned; BBC functions as such are not covered by diplomatic privilege.”(From Mr Linton, British Embassy, Vienna, to Maconochie, JIAD, Commonwealth Office, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1967)

Copied into this exchange was Charlton Higgs, the head of the BBC’s External Transmission Services, who noted that

“Kurt Huber, our paid reporter in Vienna, was originally on the staff of the Embassy...Huber continues to be paid for his monitoring work...by the Embassy in Vienna...for which reimbursement is made against demand notes in London...The phrase “for Official Purposes” must not appear unless each item is specified. However, now that technical monitoring is less regarded as helping the BBC and more as a task of national importance in which both the Diplomatic Service and the BBC are involved, I would have thought that a receiver for BBC technical monitoring could be justified as a requirement for “official purposes”(1<sup>st</sup>, January 1968)

As the centre of calculation sought to “solve” the problem, the ambiguous nature of monitoring at the time is further revealed in another letter to Maconochie from Linton, who having spoken to Huber himself, revealed that

“Herr Huber was extremely apprehensive of the sort of consequences for him which might result from our re-opening of the case. It is possible that we might lose his services altogether...His avoidance of tax would not be seen in any better light if it were found that his original declaration about this receiver was in fact, though inadvertently, untrue and that he was currently operating in what might be regarded by officials as a clandestine capacity. Furthermore he would still be unhappy if it appeared to the Americans that he was doing work in another Embassy which might for some reason be classified as confidential. It might also impair our relations with the Americans here”(19<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, British Embassy, Vienna)

Here is where the issue of scale, which is so important to address in any theoretical push towards a more object-oriented geopolitics, rears its head. Scale is vital to the flat ontology of DeLanda, Latour and, to an extent, Harman. The radical call to abolish scale altogether within human geography is made by Marston, Jones & Woodward (2005), in favour of “(a) focus on both material composition and decomposition, maintaining that complex systems generate both systemic orderings and open, creative events (but) leaving room for systemic orders (which) avoids the

problems attendant to imagining a world of utter openness and fluidity that inevitably dissolves into problematic idealism”(424) Latour regards scale as a “myth” in the study of collective phenomena<sup>26</sup>. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the hybrid theoretical framework allows us to shift between the materialities of different radio assemblages, operating at various spatial registers, from the governance space of early radio regulation to the transmitters at Masirah and the radio sets implicated in BBC monitoring and, furthermore, to demonstrate the different material and discursive forces which act to constitute the make-up of these sites, objects and networks. What is going on, when we talk about changes of scale, for Latour, is simply a shift in the nature of *instrumentation* or the *site of collection*. In the letter above, the paragraph seems to shift from the scale of individual (or even sub-individual) affective states “Huber was extremely apprehensive”; the micro-politics of objects “tax/declarations regarding the receiver”; to the macro/geopolitical level “Our relations with the Americans here”. Regardless of whether Latour’s contention about the ontological reality of “jumping between scales” is valid or not, I think this demonstrates how important and undervalued the “technical archive” of media organizations is with regard to what it can offer analysis of popular geopolitics. The relationship between the BBC, the DWS and the Foreign Office is reflected in the wrangling over justification for the “receiver” being transmitted through “the bag”, (this is to say the diplomatic bag). Linton ultimately suggests that

“Our legal adviser is strongly of the opinion that if the new receiver is to be used outside the Embassy it would have been preferable to have imported it in the normal way, getting authority from the ministry of Foreign Affairs, which would just as effectively have avoided payment of customs duties...The importation by bag will not absolve us from the necessity of clearing its receipt with the M.F.A since we must avoid any possibility of the set being identified later in Herr Huber’s house with no record as to its importation or existence”

Maconochie transmits this information to Higgs, who accedes

“If it is wise to declare the new receiver and pay Import Duty to the Austrian authorities, the cost will be born by the BBC. If the appropriate procedure should be for Huber to pay this sum he can claim it from Mrs. Kuttler, Embassy Cashier, for reimbursement here in London against Foreign Office Demand Note.”(30<sup>th</sup> January 1968)

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<sup>26</sup> DeLanda, contrastingly, does not, although the “relations of exteriority” on which his Deleuzian theory of assemblages rests, reads scale as non-hierarchical and based on associations, and in this respect, is not of an ontologically different register to Latour.

## 5.4 Conclusions.

This chapter has demonstrated, through a technique of archival vignette, the textual-materialist hybrid approach to the popular geopolitical, and that the geography of radio waves can be found and written in a variety of (marginal) historical sources. Crucially for this theoretical framework, these assemblages can be seen in different sites at different scales *simultaneously*, animated by a variety of material and discursive forces. More than this, though, it has shown how we can, even in cultural studies, escape the over-focus on macro-level explanations of technology which have become paradigmatic in readings of popular geopolitics. It takes seriously the call to evaluate “networked ontologies of media” (Dittmer & Gray, 2009) and, always partially, their being-technological. The ability to perceive, or rather “sense” the radio wave, as argued above, emerges necessarily as a feature of *instrumentation*, as a facet of the instrumental rationality with which Harman, through his reading of Heidegger is concerned. The relay station in section I and the receiver in section II are both instrumental modes of conducting and “making sensible” broadcast waves (in a purely phenomenological sense, rather than Ranciere’s use of the term) and, consequently, re-configure the “world” in which they are implicated.

This approach, though, can raise as many questions as it answers. It may seem that through the attempts I make here towards a truly inter-disciplinary synthesis, we might lose some of the focus on what is “popular” in popular geopolitics. I don’t believe that this is the case though. Attention to the materiality of popular geopolitical institutions and systems of representation (in this case the BBC) provides an augmentation of what another Object Oriented Philosopher, Ian Bogost, has referred to as the persistent “ontography” of objects. The visual-symbolic grammar of the “exploded view” diagram has, for many years, been central to creating an understanding of the “meanwhile” of complex objects and technologies. For Bogost, the exploded view fulfils an aesthetic as well as a formal technical function, it “[s]hows the mating relationships of parts, subassemblies and higher assemblies...An anonymous, unseen situation of things is presented in a way that effectively draws our attention to its configurative nature. An ontograph records the

presence of many potential unit operations, a profusion of particular perspectives on a particular set of things” (Ibid, p 51)

This chapter develops from (whilst recognising its origins in) the OOO tendency towards Bogost’s “liturgical ontography” - a descriptive play on the escaping character of objects in OOO - towards less abstracted assemblage geographies and Latourian STS as demonstrated in the legal, organizational and territorial materialities of the radio network we find in the archive. This is intended to take account of at least some of the ways in which the “hidden life of things” goes on utilising a specific historical approach and illustrated through a specific set of empirical resources which can be seen to speak to the different constellations of the radio network as a socio-material assemblage. As discussed above, conducting research within this theoretical framework can lead to an approach where we end up saying a great deal about “little things”, as no matter how “small” something might be on one spatial level, under the ontology of assemblage it is deepened and exploded by virtue of its connections and what it *does* to or with other things. This has been the logic of selection of the examples above, and remains the logic of selection in the chapters that follow on texts and individuals. It will become clearer, I hope, that I am arguing for the way in which these objects/technologies/texts and people come together and coalesce in assemblage, and how much added value such an approach can bring to the study of popular culture in geopolitics of which radio is both a set of representations, individuals and infrastructures.





## Chapter 6

# The Geopolitical news serial as textual-linguistic assemblage: *From Our Own Correspondent*

*“A foreign correspondent ought not to take himself too solemnly; once a correspondent becomes pompous, he starts drawing self-portraits against an exotic background instead of dealing with that background itself. I liked, when I began the job, to say that I was ‘interpreting’ one country to another. Now I know that claim went much too far; all you can really do is illustrate the ways in which a foreign country differs from your own and to explain and justify them. This ‘justifying them’ is important because it is a basic human instinct to resent the ‘difference’ of the foreigner...The French are the most direct about this; they often seem to feel this difference as an outrage against good taste, whereas Italians merely regard it with a pitying wonderment. The Englishman rationalises the difference of foreigners by regarding them all as more or less unsuccessful imitations of himself; and the American draws a veil over it by immersing mankind in a warm bath of ‘human nature’, which immediately qualifies all and sundry for American-style democracy.”<sup>28</sup> (Serpell, 1957)*

*“Me, here, I, now – what linguists call “deictics”, that is, what can be pointed to – can start to have meaning, substance, only if one document is compared to another: a face and an instant photo; a name on a driver’s licence and the same name on the car registration papers; a street name in a guidebook and the same street name on a map.” (Latour 2013, <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/EN/plan13.txt>)*

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<sup>28</sup> This is obviously a practice of boundary construction in and of itself and, even as such, not entirely accurate. See, for example, the differences in colonial logics between the French and the British. The former regarded the colonial mission as the enlightenment and creation of potential Frenchmen: all subjects were taught French and encouraged to visit France. The British, on the other hand thought it preposterous that the colonial subject could ever begin to cultivate the necessary level(s) of civilisation with which the Englishman was endowed.

## **6.0 Introduction: Critical Geopolitics and Foreign Affairs Radio: Making texts matter**

In the introduction, the novelty of the approach to popular geopolitics and positions on which the thesis is based were articulated, broadly based around a hybrid theoretical apparatus which argues for the broadening of ontological frames to include “matter”, things and the non or extra-discursive in the analysis of popular geopolitics. However, it was also argued that these theoretical positions should neither reject nor preclude engagement with text, but rather to read across the theoretical positions in order to see how text operates within the radio assemblage. Both Jane Bennett and Graham Harman recognise that text does not simply “disappear” as and when we turn our focus to objects or matter. Instead, what is important for their relational materialist accounts are the *effects* that a given entity has on the world, whether it is a text, an individual, a rock or a building. As such, a text is constituted in relation to a wider system of other entities, some of which may be other texts but others, as this thesis demonstrates, are not. Thus a productive hybrid of new materialist accounts, turned towards geopolitical media should stand for is the embrace of textuality as one form of “effective” matter, and look to envisage this effectiveness in the various ways in which it can be seen in the archive.

In the previous chapter I showed how within various assemblages of radio power, governance and construction in the radio network archive, the power of both material and discursive objects within these assemblages (whether these were transmitters, treaties, receivers or islands) revealed themselves as integral to the wider geopolitical context of media broadcasting and the information and soft power dynamics of the Cold War. In this chapter, I want to focus on broadcast news texts as a way of illustrating how these narratives are also witnessed in the linguistic assemblages of popular geopolitics. Specifically this is construed here as language

constructed through a scripted radio foreign-news program produced and broadcast by the BBC from 1957 as a textual artefact producing and produced by the geopolitical. This close reading of a radio serial, *From our own Correspondent* (*FooC*), is engaged for what it is able to tell us about how we can begin to think about “texts” in geopolitics in various “more-than-textual” ways. This is achieved firstly through a reading of the archive of this radio text as a linguistic assemblage, operating along the lines of DeLanda’s particular theory of linguistics, in particular illustrating how the different linguistic components of the text can be seen to have ongoing material effects. However, as I will also demonstrate, one continuing challenge to new-materialist readings of cultural research such as this is that the foreign news serial cannot be dissociated from the analytical concepts of discourse, identity and power, even when (perhaps especially when) considered as part of the wider material-cultural assemblage of the BBC during the Cold War period. As such, the chapter will return to a post-colonial discourse analysis of one section of the *FooC* archive in order to demonstrate the importance of retaining these analyses which provide a way of illustrating the power of discursive formations that found in such serials. The programmes themselves, engage in practices of representations of distant places and Others utilising deeply instilled colonial logics and scripting.

I will argue in this chapter that while texts of foreign affairs news as serials, of the kind identified by previous studies by Sharp (2000) or Robertson (2007), cannot be excluded from the radio assemblage, they are better understood through an theory of language and text which incorporates the material and the discursive simultaneously, as opposed to by traditional understandings of the text as legible through critical discourse analysis alone. Such a view sees language as an emergent system which, yes *can* act to produce this kind of discursive power, but is not overdetermined by this capacity. This position, also recognises that the post-colonial discourse analysis is and remains indispensable to the study of geopolitical media and that theoretical developments in the direction of materialist frameworks must continue to reiterate this. Having discussed Latour’s motifs of the *center of calculation* and *inscription devices* within the context of foreign news, and how these could enable us to read the foreign news text in the light of the cartographies of assemblage in the theoretical framework, I will show how *FooC* provides us with multiple material/expressive, territorialized/deterritorialized, coded/decoded linguistic

components which form the text. However, whilst this reading of language in light of new materialism enables us to re-cast existing discourse analytic concepts, a central component of popular geopolitics is fundamentally relational. Hence, it can be absorbed into assemblage thinking without reductionism or caricature, whilst still retaining the critical thrust of, in this case, post-colonial discourse analysis. This requires us to think of intertext as one relevant set of relations amongst many. It is within this textual-material ecology that text is constantly subject to forces of “push” and “pull” upon its identity, not only from other prior and future texts and tropes (factual and fictional), but also from material components such as technology and time-space compression, along with the banal linguistic operators which are consistently cited as under-appreciated in critical geopolitics, but not investigated as such.

More broadly, the particular kind of material-textual hybrid theory for which I am arguing in relation to the popular geopolitical in FooC demonstrates that the program can be seen as a kind of *machine*. This a view of *machines* is not necessarily mechanistic in the Newtonian, strictly “mechanical” sense, but an emergent, Deleuzian one. As the Object Oriented philosopher Levi Bryant has suggested

“Not all machines are material in nature. While all linguistic entities require a material body in the form of speech or writing to exist, they nonetheless possess an incorporeal dimension that allows them to remain dormant for long periods of time, only to begin acting on other beings at another time. A national constitution is not a being composed of fixed material parts like a cell phone, but is nonetheless a machine. A recipe does not itself have any ingredients, but is still a machine for operating on ingredients. A novel does not itself contain any people, rocks, heaths, animals, bombs, or airborne toxic events but nonetheless acts on other machines such as people, institutions, economies, etc., in all sorts of ways.”(Bryant 2014, 16)

The assemblage of FooC is, then, a *mixed* material-discursive “machine” as conceived by Bryant: its content is a textual entity composed of material components of radio (fixed entities such as microphones, transmitters and analogue receivers) but also mobile discursive tropes and imaginaries located in the colonial epistemologies, reinforced through iteration within the idiolect of radio journalism. Human listeners in the radio assemblage relate to the broadcast waves through the medium of language, which we are able to critique through discourse analyses of the

kind above. The value of this kind of hybrid analysis is, once again, that it allows us to explore some of the material dimensions of texts themselves whilst continuing in the critical tradition of popular geopolitics and illustrating the dynamics of power iterated in western news scripting of the foreign, in this case, in the Cold War context.

As I have already suggested, one of the predominant modes in which Western foreign news emerges as an area of study comes from post-colonial textual criticism, particularly around understandings of the representation of place in the British Empire (see Dittmer, 2010). These understandings are located in the seminal work of Edward Said into discourses of *Orientalism* at the heart of Western epistemological traditions. Said suggested that the construction of places, people and cultures came already shot through with codes of interpretations of those being represented (the Other) as, variously, inferior, dangerous, sensualised, exotic, violent or irrational. This view was supplemented by the various radical critiques into the contingency of European history read as *world* history and the possibilities for the de-centering or “provincialisation” of Europe from this position (Chakrabarty, 2004), alongside feminist post-colonialism and anti-imperialism (e.g. Spivak, 1988). These theoretical strands gave rise to further studies exploring how journalism and travel writing (the modes of writing which birthed modern foreign news) are bound up with these questions. This can be found most notably in the writings of Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and David Spurr (1999), who each developed focused readings of how these general epistemologies- became codified within these genres, genres which have proved of interest to scholars of critical geopolitics given the obvious geographical implications of their strategies of representation (e.g. Barnes & Duncan 1993). The foundations of this line of critique is perhaps expressed best, by Edward Said’s argument that it is “Representation itself” that keeps “the subordinate, subordinate, the inferior, inferior” (Said 1993, 95, cited in Dittmer 2010, 57). This kind of critical genealogy suggests that recorded events do not emerge into the world organically as stories; rather they are “*made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterisation, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in

short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the employment of a novel or a play” (White 1978, 84).

With this in mind, when we speak of the “performance” of foreign news, we are talking about the manner in which journalistic subjects represent/constructs varying degrees of Otherness, as the above mentioned indicate. This also speaks to the manner in which the world is experienced on a phenomenological level, and how individuals and collectives make sense of these experiences through repertoires of behaviours, actions and communicative modes. Finally, in light of the previous chapter, it also can be related to the ways in which a much wider cast of material objects and relations coalesce to produce, constitute or otherwise affect these subjects and representations . This is to say that assemblage of BBC radio is the product of transmitters and circuits just as much as programs and journalists. Furthermore, this is not simply a case of relations of domination dictating knowledge production and understanding. To suggest that those media organisations with the greatest audience numbers or largest infrastructures are able, in a hegemonic manner, to produce “the world” unchallenged, for all, is too simplistic<sup>29</sup>. The various colonialisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the neo-colonialism of the 20<sup>th</sup>, could not have sustained these systems of knowledge production without an on-going process of lived re-production of the broader tropes and narratives at the level of everyday existence.

An example of how this works in practice could be expressed through my perception of the place (but also the discursive construction) “The Middle East”. Now, for Said, the Orientalism I would inevitably produce in my discourse would be genealogically traceable to the writings of travellers, the fantasies of Western artists and poets from the romantic era, even if I were not to have any particular *direct knowledge* of this through experience with the history of art; post-colonial theory or travel writing. However, the reason I will be discursively inflected/infected with these assumptions and inevitably retain a (perhaps even subconscious) imaginary of the Orient or the Levant in terms of the exotic, forbidden or dangerous is that these representations have been repeated and recycled into ever smaller, less obvious units of knowledge and imagination that they are, to all intents and purposes, invisible. I now inhabit a

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<sup>29</sup> Although we cannot simply dismiss the idea that there is a “CNN World” or, in the case of this chapter in particular, a “BBC World”.

world defined, in part, by this construction of the Orient and cannot help but be influenced by it. This construction is part of a wider core of everyday practices, linguistic utterances and performances that constantly reinforce and re-inscribe “home” and “abroad”, concepts vital to the national identity. Michael Billig has referred to the operations of these basic units in terms of the linguistic concept of *deixis*. This is to say the important load-bearing work done by inconspicuous units of language which are taken for granted as to their meanings: “the prime minister” is obviously “our” Prime Minister (e.g.). As Billig puts it, “[b]eyond conscious awareness, like the hum of distant traffic, this deixis of little words makes the world of nations familiar, even homely”(Billig 1995, 94). Heidegger (1962, 207), too, alludes to this when discussing the non-semantic content of discourse, arguing that “[w]hen explicitly hearing the discourse of another, we proximally understand what is said - or to put it more exactly, we are already with him, in advance, alongside the entity which the discourse is about”. These are two modes of presenting the nation in popular geopolitics. The latter, on a phenomenological level, prefixes the former: that when experiencing the “homely” familiarities of deixis we are already “primed” by the former. The function of one component of an assemblage is thus predicated on the exercise of the capacities of other components. More than this, though, these units of language “do” material work.

I want to make further connections between the theories of assemblage discussed in the earlier theoretical chapter and *FooC* in relation to the way in which textual representations at various scales can be seen to fit or work within this framework, as a way of progressing from existing readings of text and language in popular geopolitics to embrace a more materialist ontology. This chapter seeks to argue that language is vital in the world constructions practiced by popular geopolitical travel texts and news narratives, but seeks to argue this point from the basis of language itself as an assemblage building to text as assemblage. For DeLanda, a selection of components within (unique) language assemblages operate in two (special) ways that other assemblages do not. What is significant about *FooC* is that it provides a prime example of how characteristics of language-assemblages work together. For example the deixis of small words correlates to the capability of variable replication, and the foreign/travel writing/journalistic *scales* are operated simultaneously by language in the making up, or composition of the *FooC* texts. This way of reading

text is, as I show here, one way with which we might engage the popular geopolitical in light of alternative theories of materiality and text but should not be seen as neutralising discursive readings.

To these points above, I would add a third concept in popular geopolitics, as discussed in the literature review, and which will be relevant through the course of this chapter. This is the idea of the popular culture “serial”, outlined both by Dittmer and Sharp as a particular mode of making and reinforcing a given geopolitical imaginary. *FooC* possesses both a cultural regularity (i.e. it is, with occasional exceptions, on the air at the same time, weekly, year round) in the broadcast context and a consistent format (the 4/5 stories, 5 minute length episode has been constant since the programme’s inception) within the programme allowing it to be seen as a news “serial”. More ambiguous, though, is the extent to which the programme follows “narrative arcs” or retains “characters” or “plotlines”, all common features of the popular cultural serial. As a news programme, these narratives are dictated, week by week, by events (e.g. if a major world event/crisis or otherwise newsworthy story is occurring, then certainly one, perhaps more dispatches will be related to this in a given week; if the crisis should escalate or maintain a headline status in the wider ecology of news, this is likely to continue). Regular “Beat” correspondents are also a feature of the program, this has been the case since its inception. A “man in Washington/Paris/North Africa” features in earlier editions (particularly those from the 1950’s and 60’s) almost weekly. However, with the expansion of the BBC apparatus and globalization of news, a feature of the programme in its more recent years has been dispatches from the more “obscure” corners of the globe (obscure, this is, from the perspective of the UK listener). What this means here is that by considering *FooC* in terms of a popular geopolitical news serial, we must accept that the repeated elements we will see in its scripting(s) will often be at the level of (for example) tropes and discursive formations than those features associated with fictional serials (characters, storylines etc..). Before moving to the analysis of certain points in the archived scripts, I will give a brief, but important, reiteration of how DeLanda’s assemblage theory is employed to both add to and aid the reading(s) I propose here, before moving on to discuss how the hybridised assemblage theory must retain the textual readings of discursive tropes found within *FooC* within it, as DeLanda’s approach is unable, in its existing form, to account for the ways in which

power, through the sedimentation and reiteration of these tropes, is consistently demonstrated in popular geopolitical texts such as *FooC*.

### **6.1 Linguistic Assemblages and Broadcast Talk.**

As mentioned above, in DeLanda's assemblage theory, two specific assemblage "systems" stand out as worthy of consideration within their own right: language and genetics. The latter is not so relevant for the approach to text I am taking here and as such can be set aside, but is covered more clearly in his earlier work (e.g. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*), than in his *New Philosophy of Society*. The two ways in which language, then, differs from other social assemblages can be found in its *capabilities for variable replication* and also its ability to operate at *multiple scales simultaneously*. With regards to the former, language is both a single general entity, and also a population of individual entities existing in part-whole relations, using "sounds, words and sentences" (DeLanda 2006, 45). To this we might also add *texts*. With regards to the latter, language "shapes intimate beliefs, public content of conversations, oral traditions of small communities and written constitutions of large organisations" (ibid). So, for example, the Bible is a series of individual entities in part-whole relations (words, sentences), but also operating at multiple scales (from figures of speech through to idioms, up to doctrine, catechism, tradition and other rule-governed social behaviours). But if we are to draw a general mode of addressing the popular geopolitical radio texts within the assemblage here in this light, however, it must be demonstrated how these entities might be said to materially affect and be affected by the other components of the assemblage, beyond a purely discourse analytic reading.

The speech radio assemblage within which the textual assemblage or text machine of *FooC* is found is encoded/decoded *by* the language assemblage, but also interacts with other language assemblages (what in textual/discursive readings would be termed as *metalanguages*) *in addition to* other material components and capacities. These can be seen in the variations on "talk" which emerge in formal and

informal broadcast contexts. A conversation in public space, even if it is “about” the same subject, is located on a different section of DeLanda’s axis if it is a recorded, namely broadcast “talk”<sup>30</sup>. This is because it is subject to the forces of territorialisation and deterritorialization of material and expressive components (subject matter, microphones, location, individuals, media agendas), but also is coded along a third axis by virtue of its existence as a *linguistic assemblage* capable of replication/multiple scalar operation. We can see leanings towards this understanding in some contemporary radio scholarship. Andrew Crissell (1994), for example, suggests that “broadcast talk” is of a different type to everyday speech (this also goes for any media “conversation” involving pseudo-interaction in scripted contexts (see Thompson, 1995)). Putting this into DeLanda’s register, we see the pseudo-interaction of scripted or partially scripted “talk” as belonging to a linguistic assemblage, but *also* a radio/media assemblage which contains multiple non-linguistic components and forces, from microphones to antenna; from weather disturbances in the ionosphere to discussions over public service broadcasting, as I hope I have made clear in the previous chapter’s archival investigations. What is important here is not necessarily the micro-physics of these interactions, but *how* the discursive meta-language of broadcast talk can be translated into theories of assemblage thinking, and in the case of the radio assemblage, along with how this fits with a networked ontology of media. Indeed, DeLanda actively identifies journalism as an emergent force in linguistic history, as “large circulation newspapers (as well as advertising agencies and to a lesser extent the “telegraphic style” of the news agencies) also injected heterogeneity into the standard languages” (DeLanda 1997, 245)

He argues, too, that communications technologies ranging from the letter to the telegraph, radio, television etc...act to *deterritorialize* and “blur the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for co-presence...enable conversations to take place at a distance, allow interpersonal networks to form via regular correspondence”(DeLanda, 2006:13). Relating this, also to the discussion of Heidegger’s critique of distance in the previous chapter, which argues that whatever

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<sup>30</sup> This, too, is prefigured by Heidegger in *Being and Time* where he states that “The existential-ontological foundation of language is *discourse or talk*” (BT I. 5.34): so there exists no “outside” from which language can be observed but only within the various iterations of its usage. This concurs with assemblage, in that language never “sits still” to be observed but is instead always being used, in some context.

*deterritorialization* does, it does not achieve co-presence, in a sense of being-with: rather it dissolves into “distancelessness” (Heidegger, 1977). Put simply, *deterritorialization* would, for Heidegger, further proscribe the possibilities for human Dasein to exist authentically. Whilst Deleuze and, to an extent, DeLanda have received attention in the social sciences, particularly in geography and urban studies, they remain relatively under-theorised within international relations/international studies, and even less in the interdisciplinary literature on popular culture and international relations, which as discussed in the introduction and literature review, remains largely rooted in the discursive tradition of post-structuralism. Given the outline of DeLanda’s theory of language above, though, it is not evident why this is the case, as the relevance and applicability of these ideas to the study of the cultural dimensions of international society seem clear. The only difference is the scaling of the entities involved which, as both DeLanda and Latour, point out is far from simple. As one recent contribution in international security and assemblage has theorised,

“What becomes important at very large-scale entities is the manner in which any particular language is used in relation to other languages. In other words how a language takes up a particular position in concrete world history. This position is not arrived at in a neutral manner. It takes collisions of force and energy between bodies and matter for language to emerge and to acquire its significance” (Deuchars 2010, 174)

So, in the popular geopolitical radio assemblage it is not only technologies that deterritorialize and reterritorialize but also the variable construction of language and cultural formations which move through, between and within them. Indeed, as the records of the International Telegraphic Conferences referenced in the previous chapter demonstrate, the conversion of language into electricity and its subsequent transubstantiation back into language acted to reconfigure the meta-language of telegraphic communication itself, as various syllables, words or terminologies either became redundant or more useful based on their relative expense. Taken this way the existing discursive registers of colonialism, travel writing and journalism are also (re) created again through a collision with the force, energy and objects of radio technology to create the “new” language of *FooC*’s broadcast talk. Under DeLanda’s linguistic theory, as I read it here, the units and levels of language existing in part-whole relations are themselves subject to a range of material forces objects and contexts.

However, the material-discursive space of the text is never and can never be a wholly neutral one, in which the technologies, organizations and myriad other objects collide and produce new formations (such as programs) without any form of pre-existing power dynamic influencing and shaping the “matterings” of these formations. This speaks to one of the underlying issues with theories of new materialism as seen through assemblage; namely that through a focus on the contingent nature of these formations acts to de-politicise the manner in which they come into being. The two sections that follow look to address the ideas of assemblage theorists to the program, with the first section at 6.2 seeking to address the possibility of materialism to text, with section 6.3 following this, arguing that despite the attempts of this conceptualisation of linguistics to accommodate these dynamics, post-colonial textual analyses of *FooC*'s scriptings must remain an important part of understanding the radio assemblage as a whole, as it is able to highlight how power becomes sedimented in the journalistic tropes of foreign news, which subsequently enter material broadcast assemblages.

## **6.2 Material linguistics?: *From our Own Correspondent* (1)**

*“No less than 71 per cent of BBC Radio 4’s total output consists of news, current affairs and related programmes (BBC 1992: 28)”*

*“FooC: goes out in the domestic service Radio 4 on Saturday...It is a prestige programme, for which airfreighted tapes are preferred, though a good quality circuit will sometimes do when time is short. Length of contribution about 4.12 minutes, giving a stand back, slightly personalised view, usually, though not necessarily, of a topical subject”(WAC/E61/18/1)*

*“It’s not surprising that many correspondents say FooC is their favourite programme. It’s a chance to forget productivity for a bit and to describe how it feels covering momentous events in often exotic locations. And when they’re rarely asked to fill more than a minute or so of airtime, they welcome the opportunity FooC gives them to sit down and write at some length, perhaps 800 words, a five-minute broadcast, about the story, the characters in it and the surroundings in which it is developing”(Grant, 2006)*

The disadvantage that current affairs radio and, to an extent, television possesses in relation to print media is often found in the fact that “Radio and television can offer instantaneous coverage of an event—an air disaster, a kidnapping, a freak storm, the falling to earth of a satellite – but the press alone can offer extensive explanation and amplification of such occurrences” (O’Donnell and Todd 1980: 99, cited in Crissell: 84). The advent of programs such as *FootC* should be seen in this context, as attempt to bridge this gap: the current affairs “magazine”, offering precisely what O’Donnell & Todd argue that radio lacks in relation to newspapers when they suggest that “[i]n newspapers a kind of prioritization...is suggested to the reader by typographical devices, photographs and overall layout...but the reader can, if she chooses, ignore this implied order of priorities by going straight past the ‘lead’ story” (Ibid).

Of course, this is -to an extent - rendered moot by the recent advent of podcasts and “listen again” features immediately after transmission, where listeners can skip, rewind or go to individual items curated on websites, as language and text shift in response to material forces altering their formations. Parallel to the technological becoming of the BBC’s overseas relay stations I discussed in the previous chapter was a development in programme making itself, particularly in the news division. During the Second World War, the BBC - despite arguably being co-opted for what seemed little more than propaganda purposes - was viewed to have served the nation well, and consequently emerged in the post-war period with not only a diplomatic and governmental but also a popular mandate for expansion (Schelsinger 1978, 29). Early documents relating to the growth of the BBC’s foreign news department (BEXB) show that the war had, through regular broadcasts from the frontline, created a demand for news from abroad. Additionally, given the large numbers of British troops still stationed overseas, along with the considerable technical expertise developed by the BBC in the arts of newsgathering and war-reporting, it was understandable that the news division would seek to play to these strengths.

The earliest incarnations of what we know today as the program *From our own Correspondent* can be found in a memo of 1946, when the BBC talks department showed responsiveness to “A programme of talks by foreign correspondents...15minutes on a Thursday after 9 rather than before 8”

(BBC/WAC/E61/18/2). Radio, clearly, faces certain limitations in regards to other media, although here it seems more apt to think in terms of ambiguities. This is particularly true when one considers speech radio and news broadcasting. As one radio scholar has suggested:

“Most of its (radio’s) output...uses a ‘broadcast’ linguistic code—that is language which is colloquial, contains much redundancy, is phatic rather than referential (relatively easy where pictures and images can supply much of the referential content) and assumes a background of shared experience to emphasise things its audience has in common rather than apart”(Crissell 1994, 87)

Where this differs in our example here, is that *FooC* falls into or rather between, the issuing of strict format “news” with an emphasis on the fast, repeated bulleting format of an updated news cycle, which is occasionally interspersed with “two-way” interviews on fluid situations between reporters in the field and presenters in a studio. Instead, *FooC* is between the news “magazine” and the “performed” dramatic piece, more specifically the monologue. These monologues tell a story, give a snapshot, a mini-essay, of the journalist’s location, going “behind” the repetitious everyday of news bulletin delivery which is in essence truncated, basic and (for the journalist at least) identity-less. As such, *FooC* reports share, in production terms, the requisite editing and technical management to keep the sound of each piece as restricted as possible to the “author/performer”, with no extraneous field noises. Later discussions reveal that the subject parameters of the contributions to the program were a source of debate early on; as a later memo states

“Our conclusion is that the only way to ensure regular billing would be to change the whole character of the series, from talks that are mostly topical and right abreast of the news to the relatively timeless treatment of background themes, which would tend to be social and cultural more often than political. This I myself think would be a pity”(BBC/WAC/memo A.E. Barker)

Barker’s input illustrates organizational attempts to adapt to the format and pitching of news in the post-war environment. Wartime broadcasting at the BBC, whilst becoming increasingly technologically and stylistically advanced was still largely propagandistic in nature, expected to serve the war effort through the narrativisation of the conflict and maintenance of public morale. Similarly in the United States, graphic artists were co-opted as popular cartographers in charge of the creation of

dynamic, aerial battle maps of the Pacific theatre of war to be circulated in the newspapers in order to shape the popular imaginary (Cosgrove & Della-Dora 2005), and British Pathe's newsreels preceded cinema programs, the BBC's *News from the Front* relied on the popular authority of the voice. Broadcasters such as Richard Dimbleby were instrumental in the creation not only of their own status but also of the BBC's news wartime narratives through radio. Changes in programme making style in the period immediately after this were neither pre-planned nor predictable. Radio was, by this time a "grown up medium", but still had significant stylistic avenues open to its creative development in the creation of news narratives (Schelsinger, 1978)

It is in within this culture that *FooC* was born and rapidly became one of the BBC's most popular and longest running programs in any genre. The earliest script cards in the archive date from 1957 and full programme scripts are kept on microfilm from January 1958 to December 1969, with those from 1969 to 1998 stored chronologically, mixed in with other scripts rather than by programme. This presented significant challenges for locating individual episodes. The series was designed to give foreign correspondents whose primary role was to provide truncated factual reports to fit into news bulletins a semi-creative broadcast space where the context of these reports could be written in greater detail. Such an approach served, once again, the cultural paternalism of the BBC's management: the creation of *FooC* would educate news listeners in broader terms about the regions, countries, political crises, conflicts and geopolitics<sup>31</sup>. The correspondent was briefly elevated to the status of the essayist within this architecture of knowledge.

In the public domain/archive, there exist six edited collections of *FooC* broadcasts published between 1980 and 2008 which contain texts of broadcasts selected from across the existing archive of the programme. Finally, the programme's website, revamped in 2009, contains text synopses and audio *recordings* of all editions broadcast since 2010 (see *fig.21*)

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, from the perspective of British interests

The analysis of this particular radio text conducted above reveals several further components to the geopolitical assemblage of radio which sit simultaneously within those infrastructural and organizational components addressed in the previous chapter. In *FooC*, we see, firstly, the absence of the material mode of transmission (i.e. any recording of the broadcast itself) in the archive, replaced with a separate text-object: the transcription of the spoken word, optically miniaturized for storage in microform, at about 1/25<sup>th</sup> of the regular typed page. What this means in practice is that the script has undertaken two shifts in its material form: from broadcast, whereby it's audio quality and transmission fidelity were of primary importance alongside its textual content (belonging to the order of broadcasting seen in the previous chapter) to a written script which was then miniaturized to be archived. It is interesting to note that in both the first and final stages of its existence, the text requires the mediation of another technical object to make it "sensible"; in the form of a radio transmitter/receiver in the case of the broadcast and an optical magnification machine or reader in the case of the microform script. In relation to popular geopolitics, then, there is a tension between the practices of scripting engaged in by the representational/discursive apparatus of the text and the manner in which these texts emerge, disperse and dissipate (as broadcasts on the airwaves) only later to be re-cast, re-coded and stored (as scripts in the archive).

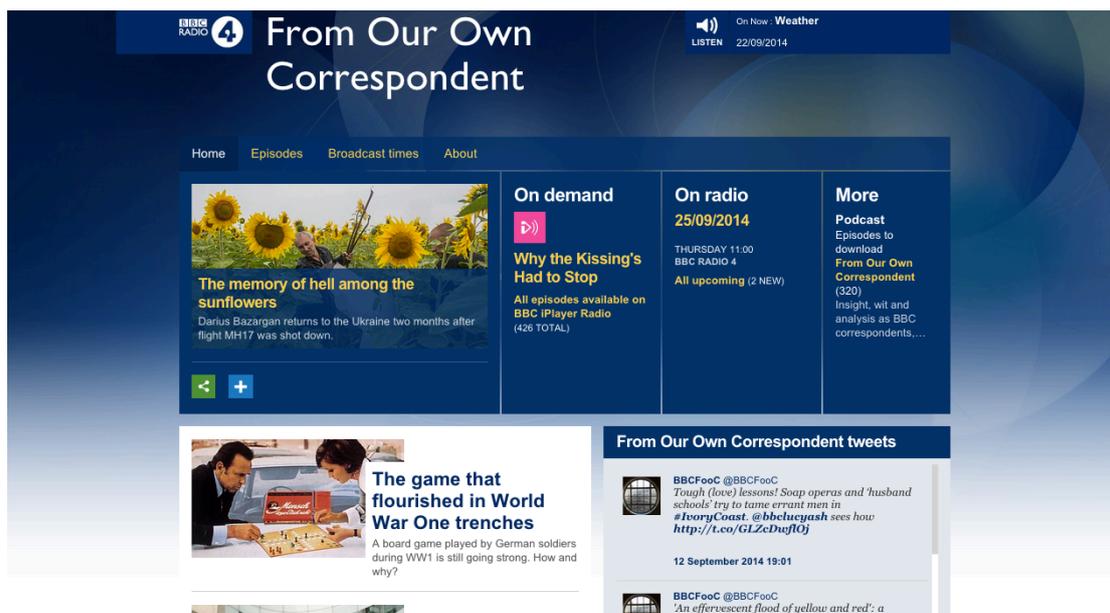


Fig.21 From Our Own Correspondent Webpage, Screenshot, 20/09/2014

To read *FooC* over the course of this chapter as a popular geopolitical text in light of the textual-materialist assemblage framework I have constructed here, the first argument I want to make about the programme is regarding its internal segmentation, specifically with regards to the *titling* of each segment. These retain a certain consistency across the programme's history, although a definite trend emerges in more recent editions towards slightly longer forms in later eras until, after the revamping of the programme site in 2011 referenced above, the segment titles are augmented by general text abstracts.

**18/03/2010**  
BBC foreign correspondents with the stories behind the world's headlines. Introduced by Kate Adie.  
Duration: 30 minutes  
First broadcast: Thursday 18 March 2010

[Add to Favourites](#) [Share](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#)

### Chapters 6 items

**Introduction**

**Vatican ends "wall of silence" over child abuse scandal**  
As the Pope becomes embroiled in the latest scandal surrounding Catholic priests in Germany, the BBC's David Willey questions whether he has been doing his job properly.

**Relatives of Argentina's disappeared**  
As Argentina tries to come to terms with its brutal past, the relatives of those who disappeared in the 1970s won't rest until those responsible are brought to justice.

**Is time up for Madagascar's leader?**  
A political crisis has engulfed Madagascar's leader Andry Rajoelina, who seized power a year ago and now faces sanctions for failing to set up a unity government.

**Fragile Bosnia still not at peace**  
While Bosnia tries to progress towards its goal of EU membership, Mark Lowen finds that beneath the surface, the country is still steeped in ethnic tension.

**Tajikistan softens its approach to rape victims**  
In the central Asian country of Tajikistan, victims of rape have traditionally been outcast, but now authorities are softening their approach, as Angus Crawford finds.

### Podcast

**From Our Own Correspondent**  
Insight, wit and analysis as BBC correspondents, journalists and writers take a closer look at the...

Fig.22 *FooC* Running order, March 2010 (via website)

FROM: NEIL BRUCE, FOREIGN NEWS DEPARTMENT, 225 BOSTON HOUSE.

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENTS

No. 117 (Second Service)

SATURDAY, 5th. MARCH, 1960. HOME SERVICE: 0815/0845 GMT.

(a)	CHARLES WHEELER: Indian reaction to Khrushchev's visit. Text of cable read by NEIL BRUCE, 4.3.60. DLO 9864/A.	4'24"
(b)	ANTHONY LAWRENCE: Khrushchev in Indonesia. Text of cable read by ALAN SKEMPTON, 4.3.60. DLO 9864.	6'31"
(c)	CHARLES WHEELER: Khrushchev in Afghanistan. Recorded from Kabul, 4.3.60. DLO 13055.	2'26"
(d)	DANIEL COUNIHAN: Eisenhower Circus, N.33. Recorded from Montevideo, 2.3.60. DLO 10692/A.	5'14"
(e)	THOMAS CADETT: Travelling Statesmen, N.491. Recorded from Paris, 4.3.60. DLO 12967.	6'18"
(e)	PETER RALEIGH: General de Gaulle in Algeria. Recorded from Algiers, 4.3.60. CDLO 12654.	3'02"

OVERALL DURATION: 20'16"

RECORDED ON FRIDAY, 4.3.60, at 2130 GMT. TAPE NUMBER: TLO

H.F.N.  
A.H.F.N.  
Mr. Barran.  
Mr. Counihan.  
Miss Howlett, 726 CE Bush.  
Press Office, 12 Cav. Sq.  
Miss Redman, 35 M.H. St.  
Registry, Langham.  
Miss Wheatley, 201 Cav. Sq.  
News Information, 104, Egton.  
A.H.N.T., 121 Egton.  
Current Affairs Secretariat, 402, 25 M. Road.  
Mr. McIntyre, 210 BH.

Fig.23 FooC running order No.117, March 1960 (BBC WAC, Microfitch printout, photograph by the author)

The two figures above illustrate both consistency and change in the program. Given the scale of the archive, it was impossible, not to say unproductive to engage and catalogue every scripted edition of the program over even a ten or twenty year period for which scripts were available and consequently, certain research decisions discussed in the methodology section became central to this process. Further material components of the programs (as general rules) can be catalogued as followed: The average length of a broadcast being 500-800 words, a program featuring 5 or sometimes 6 broadcasts, once a week for up to 40 weeks per year quickly expands to become an entirely different project, one with no little value in itself, but not relevant to the analysis I am conducting here. My concern is with the identity of the program as a whole as a linguistic-textual assemblage, operating along DeLanda's ontological axes in conjunction with Latour's idea of centres of calculation *vis a vis* the production of foreign news and, how we might ultimately

come to think of the popular geopolitical “serial” as a linguistic assemblage coming to exist over time as a result of the push and pull of these various material forces.

Cutting across the archive, then, taking a selection of scripts from different eras, and given the ease with which we can digitally access more recent editions reveals the discursive importance of the kind of *deixis* or small language units I discussed above, to the program as a whole. Broadly, they can be distributed as one or a hybrid along the following schema at *fig.24*.

- 1) Question: “Are Americans creating a state of fear in the U.S.?”
- 2) Statement/negative: “*Bitterness* and *unease* in *Bankrupt Zimbabwe*”
- 3) Statement/positive: “Europe’s *booming Amazon* spaceport”
- 4) Statement/hybrid: “Poles draw *strength* from *tragic past*”
- 5) Encounter/person/group: “Globe trotting with Mrs Clinton”
- 6) Encounter/place: “The marble quarries of *Tuscany*”
- 7) Other/non identity: “Deciding not to save the Bluefin Tuna”

*Fig.24. Meta-Schema for FooC segment titles.*

The examples of each of these “types” I’ve given above are drawn from episodes from the last 10-15 years. The titling seems neither peripheral nor unintentional. If oblique references were to be stipulated, then each segment would clearly be labelled “dispatch from *x*” where *x* would be either a region or state and whilst there is definitely a trend towards this kind of simplicity the further back one goes in the script library, it is by no means total. For instance, a running order from 1958 contains the following titles

- |                          |                                |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Super Sabre Rattling  | 4) Public Secrets              |
| 2) What does China want? | 5) Jordan’s Economic Outlook   |
| 3) United Nations        | 6) America’s cup scene-setter. |

*Fig. 25 (FooC 1958 Running order.) BBC WAC.*

Which are clearly less linguistically complex than the previous examples but still have second order semantic content. Interestingly, though, these titles, as written do not appear in the programs themselves; the segments are introduced by a continuity announcer who gives a scripted introduction to the piece but does not repeat the segment title directly. This raises the question of what purpose these clearly intentionally chosen titles serve, with the most likely answer being twofold: firstly to act as a sorting mechanisms for editors to assess pitches for stories during the program making process and secondly as an archiving device for internal researchers to find pieces by region.

The spatio-geographic imaginary created within the titles often, though by no means always, corresponds with a temporal imaginary that shifts between *tenses* (grammatically) and *temporalities* (rhetorically). For example “Why English is still a dominant force in Ghana” (Leighton, *FooC* 2010) occupies two temporal moments; as a statement about the present state of language within Ghana but also, as a trace of the forces of colonialism (in the past), manifested (in the present) through language. In DeLanda’s linguistics, this again shows the special manifestations of language as a separate assemblage, with the grammatical, tense-based reading of the statement showing a single entity in a part-whole relation (i.e. a sentence of words and sounds), whilst simultaneously operating at multiple scales i.e. a statement about past *and* present.

Another way in which popular geopolitics has traditionally identified texts is through its attendance to the effects they have on audiences. These readings emerge from somewhat crude and unreflective theories of propaganda, which cast audiences as passive and malleable, whilst focussing on the particular symbolic makers utilised to effect this. Later audience studies place audiences in a much more active role, as participating in the construction(s) of meaning produced through popular geopolitical texts, for example through fan communities of particular film series or genres (Dodds 2006; Dittmer & Dodds 2008).

So far I have made the case for a number of ways in which we can read the news serial of *FooC* in light of the new materialist theories of DeLanda and others. These have related specifically to the ability of DeLanda’s assemblage theory to accommodate language as special case within this theory, acting in and of itself to

territorialize/deterritorialize material and expressive components. In addition to this, we can also see the coding and re-coding of the *FooC* scripts as material objects, transitioning from broadcast to written text to microform reel. However, the challenge to DeLanda's linguistics remains that even if we conceive of unit operators of language as having effects and being affected by wider networks of materiality, this remains difficult to illustrate in a systematic manner.

In the next part of this chapter, I will demonstrate how any adoption of the materialist-assemblage framework towards popular geopolitics requires the maintenance of a strong reading of the discourses and power relation at work *within* the text body itself, particularly in relation (in this case) to how the sedimentation of colonial modes of representation can be seen to operate within the scripts during the Cold War period. These considerations also illustrate how the textual dynamics of *FooC* during this time were further reflective of the twofold nature Cold War geopolitics (i.e. East/West superpower competition along with or sometimes overlaying the emergence of the post-colonial world)

### **6.3 The Text Assemblages: Colonial discourses and journalistic travel writing, *From our own Correspondent* (2)**

To illustrate some of the components I have discussed previously, this section will combine the linguistic operation of the segment titles, with a close reading of some of the actual reporting conventions, tropes and discourses employed in the 1960's editions of *FooC*. This is intended to act as a bridge between the "traditional" reading of geopolitical texts, grounded in post-colonial discourse analysis seen in earlier work on popular geopolitics, with the view of assemblage I am arguing for here which recognises the importance of retaining this kind of textuality as a vital interpretive lens for popular geopolitics. The titles of segments from the 1950's and 1960's often appear to be more focused around individuals (specifically heads of state) and individual states. For example, beginning with this running order from a script of 19<sup>th</sup> September 1959

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Explosive Mixture     | 4. Impression of Laos                        |
| 2. Kruschchev Survey     | 5. General DeGaulle's declaration on Algeria |
| 3. Impressions of Russia | 6. Malta                                     |

*Fig. 26. From or own Correspondent, 19/09/1959 BBC WAC*

In this case, the items are possessed of self-explanatory titles (with the exception of (1)). Note however, the visual language of segments 2, 3 and 4. In these segments the correspondent is inserted grammatically prior to the place being "observed", creating a clear division between observer and observed, a direct corollary to the tropes of travel writing-as-exploration. Similarly, we also see in the 1960's period many hybridised reports, which juxtapose individuals with places, as was often the case in the *FooC*'s of the early Cold War and where leadership was metonymic with place. This running order from 1960 is, typical of this style, which is reproduced from the pictured script above at *fig.23*

1. Charles Wheeler: Indian Reaction to Krushchev's visit
2. Anthony Lawrence: Khrushchev in Indonesia
3. Daniel Counihan: Eisenhower Circus
4. Thomas Cadett: Travelling Statesman
5. Peter Raleigh: General de Gaulle in Algeria.

*Fig.27 FooC running order:no.117 5<sup>th</sup> March 1960 BBC WAC*

To focus in more detail on this particular episode, from 5<sup>th</sup> March 1960 it is in some ways emblematic of the manner in which distant places (that is, distant from London) were often conceptualised by *FooC* in this period: largely as receptacle for the motion in and out of travelling leaders of the super-powers. Wheeler's report, for instance, illustrates this

"There may be a distinct lack of warmth in Indian feelings for Mr Khrushchev, but there is no lack of respect. Americans here, who were congratulating themselves because his personal success in India was smaller than that of President Eisenhower, are now saying that Mr Khrushchev's propaganda line, on foreign aid, may prove to be dangerously effective. But the fact is that while the Americans have quietly rescued India from a series of foreign exchange crises, the Russians has all along concentrated on impact projects, like the steel plant at Bhilal. True, there's talk of another massive steel plant for India, this time to be built largely with American capital, but if this project materialises, the Russian propaganda line will be clear—that out of fear of Communist competition, the Americans are trying to hide their colonialist motives by imitating Russian forms of aid"(Wheeler 1960, BBC/WAC)

Where places appear explicitly, once again they are refracted through the (double) gaze of correspondent and visiting leader.

"Certainly the Indonesia trip was no easy ordeal for Mr. Khrushchev, although his experience of the tropics has been much enlarged—first Djakarta, a mixture of village and sprawling city, with mud coloured canals, peeling walls, palm trees and hordes of people—then the countryside, lush green to the horizon, endless miles of ricefields, volcanoes winding mountain roads, and always everywhere damp heat with perspiration soaking shirts and staining in dark patches the backs of uniformed men lined up to receive visitors on airfields the steps of palaces. Khrushchev went through with it all doggedly, doubtless noticing the absence of factories or industrial development, heavy military precautions in areas where rebels are active, age old methods of agriculture...he wanted to stamp on the Indonesian mind a friendly, reasonable image of Soviet Communism and its leader. He must have had in mind the Indonesia lies many thousands of miles away from what might be considered the Russian sphere of influence and that is much nearer China, hitherto the acknowledged leader of Asian communism"(Lawrence, 1960 BBC/WAC).

The description of landscape here is, then, evacuated of its inhabitants in the service of demonstrating the correspondent's grasp of Khrushchev's gaze upon it; a double articulation, then, where the descriptions of landscape are employed with knowledge of the conventions of the medium (i.e. radio), which dictate the need for language to substitute for (by creating) image, although with a clear foregrounding of the

statesman at the centre of the “painting”. If this is not exactly Freidrich’s *The Wanderer above the Mists*, then it almost certainly demonstrates the origins of what both Chouliaraki and Robertson identify in television news as tropes of the foregrounding and backgrounding of correspondent-landscape-Other.

The relevance of the titles also becomes clearer here. In the episode from 1959, segments on states were titled “Impressions of...”, and Lawrence’s reference to the desire to “stamp on the Indonesian mind a reasonable image”, that is to *create an impression*, or to inscribe upon a surface<sup>32</sup>. However, unlike the earlier travel writing discourses of missionary/civilising, this report and others like it cast places entirely in relation to their utility or otherwise within the meta-narrative of the Cold War. Distant, “exotic” places such as Indonesia are not thought of as populated by souls to be saved, bodies to be disciplined or, even, necessarily markets to be penetrated, but rather as units to be allocated to sides of a geopolitical ledger. This is as true of the travels of world leaders as it is of the radio journalists who travelled with them, micro-chronicling these journeys. This dual-representation at work in the correspondents’ coverage of leaders travels *combines* and, to an extent, confuses the generic conventions of foreign affairs journalism with travel writing. It raises the question of “who” is the “explorer” in this narrative: the journalist or the politician? Whilst the answer to this isn’t immediately clear, what is clear is that the role of the subject, previously occupied by “blank space” on the map, then by exotic others to be civilised had, by the 1960’s and the establishment of a modern journalistic discourse, become modified into a more nuanced pattern of representations, commensurate with the geopolitical priorities of superpower competition. This gives further credence to the need for an understanding of the way in which technology affects the post-colonial discourses embedded within the journalistic travel narratives of FooC,.

Tracking forward in time, the distillation of Khrushchev’s movements within the text of the episode is concluded by Charles Wheeler (again) from Kabul. Wheeler’s presentation of two pieces in this respect is unusual within the conventions of the program, although this gives an insight into the arts of the possible under which the

---

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed discussion of the politics surrounding the idea of “impressions”, “surface” and emotion as employed in contemporary political discourse see Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh, 2004)

BBC was operating at the time. In the opening segment, prior to Wheeler's first report on India, the reader announces that "Charles Wheeler is in Kabul at present, and he also covered Mr Khrushchev's visit to India. Before he left New Delhi, he sent us this despatch, but owing to transmission difficulties, it is being read in the studio."<sup>33</sup> The correspondent, then, following the leader, following the journey of around 1,300km across the strategic borderlands of Cold War Asia is still restricted by the capacity of a given infrastructure to transmit and receive any given parcel of information. Wheeler's broadcast from Kabul, the last stop on Khrushchev's tour once again underscores the hybridisation of travel narrative journalism and representations of Cold War geopolitics in British foreign news.

"Soviet-Afghan relations, he (Khrushchev) has said, are the perfect example of co-existence and co-operation between a very large country and a small one. Pointing with a sweep of his arm at the snow-capped mountains surrounding the valley here, he said: 'The mountains between our countries are high, but they are no barrier to our friendship.' And the vast Afghani crowd cheered lustily."(Wheeler 1960, BBC/WAC)

The appearance of the (subject) population (i.e. Afghans), as grammatically subordinate to both the territorial and the topographical is also telling here. The fact that they are also subject to representational tropes (*vast Afghani crowds cheered lustily*) characteristic of earlier typologies of colonial journalistic discourses articulated by David Spurr. These spatial anxieties, or rather confusions, created by the coverage of the tours are apparent in almost all of the despatches contained within episode 117. In the very next segment, Daniel Coughlin, who had been following President Eisenhower around Latin America, reported that,

"[S]ome of us who travelled with him were beginning to ask a little plaintively: 'what is it all for?—what good can this do?' We felt that the pace was too quick, the length of each visit far too short for anything to result that could be of real benefit to either guest or host. *Some of us found ourselves momentarily uncertain on occasions as to which country we were in:* I once caught myself wearily heading a letter 'Santiago, Argentina, for that very morning I had been placed securely in a large metal container and projected to Chile, my mind was still fishing for small stream trout with President Eisenhower and for minnows of news with Mr Hagerty in a trout stream and word flooded press room, both of which were now hundreds of miles behind me in the mountains of Southern Argentina. In fact I fear that 'confusion' is too sober a word to describe the states of mind of myself and numbers of my colleagues at this stage of the fantastic journey. I felt like a sketchily-defined character in some piece of science fiction—the Eisenhower touring party were space travellers without any real foothold on earth." (Coughlin 1960, BBC/WAC)

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<sup>33</sup> "Announcer" *From our own Correspondent* No.117, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1960

Counihan's report differs from both Wheeler and Lawrence's. It is more reflexive, more aware of its own conventions and, I would suggest, momentarily opens itself to the effects of technology on professional identity. The disorientations engendered by the specific kind of travel Eisenhower and his party and, consequently, by Counihan serves to create a different mode of experience reflected in his narrative. This is characteristic of what Walter Benjamin spoke of as one element of the "negative shock experience" of modernity located both within the deterritorializing tendencies of media technology *and* the effects this was having on language. Consequently we find in Benjamin I think, a proto-reading of DeLanda's view of linguistics. Benjamin argued that despite the rapid development of technical capacities/prostheses to record events and distribute representations (e.g. in newspapers), the ability to *witness* was becoming cauterized. This, he hypothesised, was a consequence of modernity's bringing about of a fundamental shift from one kind of experience: towards *Erlebnis* or "living" "immediate" experience and away from *Erfahrung*, a repository of "integrated" "lived" experience(s) (Benjamin 2004; see also Rando 2011). The nuance between these two terms is, as with so much in German philosophy and critique, inherent to the language (appropriate, given the focus of this chapter). There is no diametric opposition between the two terms, and they cannot be encapsulated by English binaries of past/present, general/specific or transitory/enduring, but rather as a hybrid (or assemblage) of these. Where Benjamin is often regarded as technologically deterministic in this regard, DeLanda's reading suggests that alterations in linguistic code brought about by media and broadcast technologies were and continue to be non-linear, locally contingent and often unpredictable.. I don't simply want to suggest that the disorientation described by Counihan is worthy of note in the context of travel narratives (this is banal at best). Instead, what is going on is a blurring and indistinctness at the very heart of the linguistic construction itself as the correspondents are affected by material changes in the nature of broadcasting.

Counihan alludes to a high speed, long distance travel in which the journalist is at the same moment traveller and *observer of travel*. (S)he must provide not only an impression of place, people or politics but in instances such as the above, also a transliteration of the impressions made by a third party. This further distances this kind of travel writing from the mode of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century narratives

of Mungo Park, John Hanning Speke and David Livingstone; the gaze of the broadcaster is no longer free to make, or inscribe pure sense of (exotic) places at will but, instead, is now subject to multiple other pressures (technical, institutional etc..) on his/her production of text. Whilst it is true that this earlier mode of exploration and travel too relied on a variety of technical objects, particularly equipment for scientific measurement (Driver, 2001; Latour 1987), the key difference between this and what I am referring to here is that speed is overriding factor in the broadcaster's entanglement with technologies. To be sure, Scott "raced" Amundsen to the South Pole, and Livingstone and Stanley pursued their rendezvous with a certain urgency, but the difference is measured in a different order of time between this and the pressure of hours, minutes and seconds under which modern (this is to say post WWII) journalism operated. The reference Counihan makes to "Science fiction, space travel" further speaks to this, and to the hierarches of space-time maintained in Cold War journalism. Regular *FooC* contributor, Douglas Stuart shares such an interpretation in his autobiography, where he suggests that

"As a consequence of to-day's rapid air transport, it is becoming more and more the custom for editors to send reporters from home to cover news from abroad rather than to rely on the man on the spot. Government, too, appears to be following the same course, which, if not checked, could mean that Ambassadors as well as Foreign Correspondents may be permitted to die out... Too often the peripatetic diplomatist, politician and journalist asks the question but, like jesting pilate, does not stay for an answer. Perhaps there is no answer; but there can be understanding of far-off countries and peoples of whom we know very little provided that we listen to the men on the spot."(Stuart 1970, 11)

The final two broadcasts of 117 engage with the movements of another Western leader of the time, who features prominently in *FooC* despatches during the late 1950's and mid 1960's, perhaps understandably: Gen. Charles de Gaulle. Correspondent Thomas Cadett transposes the (in)formal organizational structures immanent to Cold War leadership politics and articulates, effectively, the understandings absent from and upon which the previous segments were predicated.

"Whatever doubts there still may be about France's eligibility for the international atom bomb club, one thing at least is certain: it is that her President, Charles de Gaulle, is well on the way to establishing a title to full membership of the travelling statesman's club. He has made visits to almost every part of the homeland; he is at this moment moving about Algeria among the army there on his fifth trip to the country since he came to power in the middle of 1958: and next month he will visit in succession to the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. After that, of

course, he will entertain three prominent and active members of the club—Eisenhower, Mr Khrushchev and Mr. Macmillan—at the East/West summit conference here in May.”(Cadett 1960, BBC/WAC)

The collegiality of Cold War politics amongst elite actors is expressed here as a key component of the correspondent’s travel narrative. Even as Cadett reports de Gaulle’s statement that “[a]bove our heads hovers the menace of certain totalitarian ambitions that we are aware of,”( Cadett 1960, BBC/WAC), the essentially cordial nature of power politics (at least at the level of the personal) is reinforced, through the identification of a “club” of “travelling statesmen”. Clubs such as these can be seen in the context of the gentlemen’s clubs of the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, perhaps most vividly illustrated (geographically at least) in the Reform Club of London, which appeared as the opening setting for Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days*, as a backdrop and discursive space for “men of empire” (and they were, at this time, always men) to meet, converse and set each other challenges explicitly linked to the developing world-image of the time. Just as Verne’s Phileas Fogg stood for the triumphal birth of a technologically enabled imperial globalism, so the ‘travelling statesmen’ symbolise the birth and rapid development of the highly mobile global elite at the beginning of the 1960’s, able to travel the world in short order to negotiate peace, war or economic opportunities; centres of calculation of a different material kind. These summits, too, are nodes in actor-networks of foreign policy in the late modern era; lines of communication, association and transformation are rendered and made possible to the extent that actors seeking to produce them are empowered to do so by relative power, transport and technological apparatus. Whilst the 1960’s are often regarded as the decade that brought about *mass* travel and tourism, it is often forgotten that it accelerated the mobilities of existing elites as much as it democratised them for others. This prefigures later debates in human geography around the uneven distribution of capacities for and modalities of mobility within a supposedly “shrinking” world (e.g. Creswell & Merriman, 2011; Bauman 1998).

Finally, 117 again refers to de Gaulle in its final segment, reflecting the central status given to France and her various domestic and overseas crises of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, the attempts at a *coup d’etat* by rogue officers over the war in Algeria and the ultimate collapse of the Fourth Republic. The reason for the degree of focus is not clear through any available evidence of editorial policy at the time, but I would suggest that it relates primarily to the proximity of France geographically and

politically, as a state undergoing a rapid and chaotic de-colonisation process, something with which Britain was also contending through (amongst others) the insurgencies in both Malaya and Kenya. Consequently, the demand for foreign news here could be taken to be a desire to see oneself reflected back in the tribulations of a neighbour. Peter Raleigh's *FooC* report from Algiers considers this other aspect of the mobile statesman visiting the hinterland from the metropole.

“In the words of the old American popular song—“It ain't what you say it's the way that you say it, that's what gets results”...Algiers newspapers have reported the General's remarks that the political future of Algeria still lay in the hands of the Algerians themselves...The impression is to some extent given that the General has suffered the usual sea-change that Europeans in Algiers have come to expect in their administrators, *once they've crossed the Mediterranean, and absorbed a little of the local European atmosphere.*”(Raleigh 1960, BBC/WAC)

Raleigh goes further perhaps than any of his colleagues in this narration of space. He identifies Algeria as being endowed with “the local European atmosphere” which in turn effects a change in mindset, speech and ultimately policy. The equation of climate and weather, as a mode of the spatial politics of colonialism, with the travelling body is explicitly tied to Conradian narratives of the radical otherness of non-European geographical contexts.

#### **6.4 Textual Assemblage and Material Effects**

As I have discussed above, the popularity of *FooC* is demonstrated by its extraordinary longevity in a practically unchanged format within the radio broadcast assemblage. This fact, in-and-of-itself, indicates that the program exerts a material power within the BBC as an organisation and among the BBC's listeners more widely. Given the unsystematic nature of collecting listener data within the BBC, particularly during the time period with which this thesis is concerned, the precise nature of these effects is often a matter of speculation. Certainly, in contemporary contexts of the program, for which greater information is available in the form of listener feedback and comments left on download pages for the podcasts of *FooC* (which have been available since 2009), strong support exists for the effects that the program has on the geographical imaginaries, but also the wider life-worlds of

listeners. Discourse analysis is identified in popular geopolitics as producing effects in the world through their representations: speech acts, for example, create states of affairs in the world such as war and peace, whilst patterns of representation of Others come to effect the geographical imaginaries of their audiences.

By this logic the text also has agency, but an agency manifested differentially as it generates transformations in different mediators/elements/components with which it comes into contact. In this story, then, the listener is not the only thing which is altered by the text: other texts are too (by virtue of being re-produced as intertexts); along with the journalists writing and speaking them; the subjects, regions and states being represented in them and, at a physical level, the broadcast equipment transmitting and receiving them; the social spaces which exist and are altered by their broadcast. Just as David Foster-Wallace points to the expansive relational field in which the apparently “free standing” object of the television and its broadcasts is enmeshed, so too the text of the radio broadcast, formerly a vibrant object carried on air is now fossilised in a different storage form of matter (in this case a microfiche tape of copied pages). It is precisely through the seeing of matter as something which is transmuted into different physical forms that we can read the radio script’s textuality a simultaneously a powerfully “effective” assemblage of culturally constructed tropes, identities and imaginaries, and also a shifting material object which transforms into various shapes and textures with time and yet also retains an agency through an ongoing series of effects upon the world.

“The worlds of significance that are transformed through assemblages are also worlds of value – these are *ethical* worlds. It is human activity, thought, perception and agency (albeit in different forms to how these are conventionally understood) that render the world ethical. Hence it is up to human elements of assemblages to keep the world open for ethics”(Dipriose 2009, 9)

And what do humans/can humans do in the radio assemblage? They can write and broadcast texts; people newsdesks; operate equipment. All of these are valuable agential capacities. The attention to the FooC scripts here illustrates some of the problems of how human agency, manifested through the production of the text, is still a major issue for popular geopolitics, as these radio texts illustrate the continued importance of colonial perceptions and attitudes that were transmitted on the airwaves by programs such as *FooC*.

Contemporary editions of FooC have moved to a more sentimental, global humanist post-colonial orientation, through a more dynamic use of discursive constructions in their narratives. However, simply strengthens the argument that in the human activity of writing and interpreting the world through the broadcast text (which is one aspect of popular geopolitics), the “human elements” of the assemblage cannot be dissociated from these colonial legacies, and their textual “effects” must be read in light of these power dynamics.

DeLanda’s analysis of language provides us with the beginnings of a framework for how this might be done: we must see language itself as an assemblage, an emergent phenomenon that alters in response to and drives material changes in its production and dispersal (e.g. printing or broadcasting). At the same time, however, it must also be recognised that alongside this should remain the acknowledgement that

“Attending to the ethics and politics of the post-human require also acknowledging that assemblages, as dynamic and transformative as they are, have a history, that the socio-political meanings that maybe challenged through them are often specific to place”(Diprose 2009, 9)

This illuminates one of the problems of both ANT and OOO which were highlighted in the earlier chapters: that the ability to account for the material effects of historical context and/or historicity is often absent from these accounts, specifically in relation to how the ability to write/see/construct/know is unevenly distributed both spatially and historically. It is for this reason that the genealogical view offered by critical discourse analysis, particularly in relation to how certain modes of representation are privileged and become hegemonic whilst others are silenced or marginalised. It is in this sense, then, that the centrality of post-colonial discourses must be admitted to consideration of both the material and expressive components of the BBC radio assemblage, here illustrated through the views of the world demonstrated in the textualities of FooC I have developed above. It would be impossible, not to mention an act of political erasure, to read these scripts in the light of materialist-assemblage theories without reference to discursive constructions of identity embedded within them. In this case, then, the position and rhetoric issued by “strong” proponents of new materialism, that

“[I]language has been granted too much power...How did language come to be more trustworthy than matter? Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity while matter is figured as passive and immutable, or at best inherits a potential or change derivatively from language and culture?”(Barad 2003, 801)

Is well taken, but when addressing hybrid phenomena such as the radio assemblage in which the matter involved can often not be disentangled from the linguistic and textual, then both must be read simultaneously. This poses and continues to pose a challenge for popular geopolitical analysis, predicated as it is so centrally on the textual and discursive. However, I have demonstrated in this chapter that there are ways in which the material mode and matter of transmission may be seen alongside and, in some ways, within, the discursive and textual.

## Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that the hybrid materialist approach articulated in the conceptual architecture of this thesis can provide us with a way of thinking language *as matter*, although with the recognition that within the context of the radio news serial that is *FooC*, the powerful material effects of the discursive constructions of various colonial knowledges remain central to these narratives.

Language holds somewhat of an ambiguous status within new materialist theories, with many explicitly arguing that language and discourse have attained an unwarranted hegemony. However, as I have sought to demonstrate here, there is not an inherent no contradiction in reading the popular geopolitical text of *FooC* in light of DeLanda's view on the variable replication of linguistic forms, alongside OOO theorists such as Levi Bryant's view of texts as very specific kinds of "machine". What the chapter demonstrates, though, is that the adaptability of these theoretical insights to popular geopolitics must retain the "baby" of, in the case of the radio assemblage, postcolonial discourse analysis in opening the textual components of the "machine". This is made all the more important when we look at the historical nature of the case study: the only material object, remaining from the *FooC* of the 1960's Cold War period in the archive are the microfilmed scripts. Whilst we may interpret these rolls as "broadcasts" which have undergone various changes in material from a broadcast signal to a miniaturized negative, we must still turn to post-

colonial analysis to understand how the BBC radio assemblage produced meanings within the texts of its foreign news programming as part of the Cold War political ecology.



## Chapter 7

# Individuals, Technologies and Subjectivity in radio assemblages: A Correspondent Abroad

### 7.0 Introduction: Geographical biographies, Biographical geographies

Geography retains a deep interest in the utility of biography to the study of its own histories (Barnes 2001), individuals (Macdonald 2014), groups and, most recently, the non-human (Lorimer 2013), in relation to the spatialities in which they are implicated and create. Working through the assemblage approach which has structured this project so far, this chapter draws on a biographical set of resources in radio's archive order to detail the dynamics of professional and personal subjectivity as seen through the trajectories of one individual radio news correspondent, Leonard Parkin (1929- 1993), during the years at the height of the Cold War (1960-67) when he worked as a BBC foreign correspondent in the Canada, the United States and Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo).

The relevance of this framework here can be found in research which takes assemblage thinking into the study of historical geography, arguing, for example that: "The trafficking of women and children in the interwar years was an assemblage of actual movements, policies, novels, rumours, myths, desires and paces of disembarkation, slavery, purchase and policing" (Legg 2011, 129), or in the work of Andrew Davies (2013) who utilises assemblage to analyse the process-based nature of nationalism and identity construction engendered during the Indian Naval mutiny in 1946. In this vein, I argue in this chapter that biographical subject is witnessed as another component of the radio assemblage, one which combines with the others previously described to affect and be affected by events; to act as part of and be acted upon by the networks, materials, forces and identities constituting the spaces of the radio assemblage engendered through journalism as a professional practice.

As discussed in the literature review, a body of work in geopolitics seeks to take seriously claims to geopolitical relevance for actors other than states and “professionals of statecraft” (Kuus 2008), which has come to include various media professionals such as journalists (O’Tuathail 1996; Dodds 1996, 1998; Pinkerton 2013). This work has generally focussed on the productive aspect of the journalists craft; the idea of the journalist as an individual *within* a geopolitical landscape, even if this is from an explicitly critical perspective attacking the status quo. Such studies take the work of the journalist (and by implication, the media outlet(s) which publish it) as the grounds of their investigations. Less well addressed however, is the fact that journalists, just as other geopolitical “subjects”, all subjects in fact, are compositions of multiple, sometimes conflicting, sometimes consistent identities, contexts and materials. The journalist is a professional witness, but also a son, daughter, mother, father, employee, employer; reporting both mundanity and the historic, but also affected by it; user of technologies but also constituted in relation to them. As one writer has recently put it, a move towards the recognition of the place of journalism in geopolitical discourse “assumes a journalistic power to act upon public and elite audiences and even a capacity—one might say an ‘agency’—to influence public perceptions of events, government politics and geopolitical frameworks” (Pinkerton 2013, 440). News is, as I have argued in earlier chapters and re-state here, at once raw material and product of popular geopolitics.

This chapter will approach the biography of the radio journalist through two archival readings. Firstly, the BBC’s reporting of *Operation Grapple*, the British Hydrogen bomb test covered by one of Parkin’s contemporaries Anthony Lawrence, before moving on to the ways in which technology, subjectivity and identity collide in the the private papers of Parkin, who reported from Canada, Congo and the United States during the period 1960-1965, conducted in the South Pacific in 1957,. The selection of these two substantive examples is made for the manner in which they speak directly to concerns of technological infrastructure and news text I have discussed in the previous chapters. Namely that the cultural and political geographies of journalism during this period can benefit substantially from a more relational/assemblage based approach to reading the archive, which takes the multiplicities of humans and non-humans, gender, race and class; facts and fictions

which constitute individual subjectivity within the radio assemblage, seen through the lens of the biographical archive..

Letters and letter writing are central to how we understand histories and representations of individuals in place. Exchanges of letters and memos, as I have shown in earlier chapters, provided us with important “connectors” between the human and non-human actants in our story. Private correspondence particularly engages the changing topographies of events, identities and surroundings composing an individual’s lived experiences. Previous studies in historical geography have demonstrated the importance of letters in the construction of individual biographies in relation to 19<sup>th</sup> Century imperialism. As Nicola Thomas (2004; 496) points out, “(l)etters formed the most frequent link to ‘home’ for those living in the ‘empire’, links that provided security, but also more practical forms of advice and support”. The letters used in this chapter are, in a manner similar to the texts used in the earlier chapters, occupying a time during the decline of (the British) empire, but when the “new” colonial geopolitics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century had yet to be fully established.

The lives of explorers (Driver, 2001), colonists and colonial administrators (Lambert & Lester, 2010) and even archaeologists (Macdonald, 2013) have all received attention from geographers, ostensibly because of the very particular interpretations of and performances within spaces inherent to these identities. This kind of work has thus sought to demonstrate “[a]n awareness of the spatial interactions the biographical subject”, with the aim that this awareness “should be given greater attention in the writing of biography together with the way in which the representations of the biographical subject were absorbed and created over space” (Thomas, 2004; 498). Alongside this notion of the biographical-geographical subject, I would add the notion of the life-path to the theoretical paradigms of travel writing discussed in the previous chapter on *FooC*, incorporating as it does ideas of plot, trajectory and narrative which map the biographical subject moving in space and time:

“Plots are shaped by meta-narratives on the course or development, of nature and society as well as of the self, and theoretical propositions on relations of public and private life, thought and action, free will and determinism. Plotlines are inscribed in texts, institutions and material sites and monuments which portray a culture’s collective memory and destiny. Cultural forms as various as fairy stories, gardens,

novels, prisons, professional careers, life insurance, documentary films and war memorials set out plotlines of various form – linear, cyclical, labyrinthine—which people draw on to shape their own life stories” (Daniels & Nash 2004, 449).

I read these kind of plotlines as overlapping with the lifepath, through relational networks encompassing both mapped lives and the broader cultural context within which these lives *take-place*. I want to argue here, too, that the lifepath and the geography of biography can be extended to the context of the cold war period in general, and the figure of the foreign news correspondent in particular. The social and political upheavals of the 1960’s across the world have contributed to its being perceived as a moment of world-historical significance. Consequently it is too often overlooked that not only were these events often mediated for viewers, listeners and audiences at-a-distance, but that these mediations were nowhere near as diverse and ubiquitous as those we take for granted today. Just as the life of an individual produces various traces through which we can read and map this existence, the modern news frame produces a meta-narrative by which the “life biography” of the world can be read through the history of current events. To extend these ideas in the direction of the materialist framework is to recognise that the biographical narratives we analyse in this way are those of human subjects that are never entirely pre-possessed. This is to take seriously an idea derived from Spinoza that “To be a human mind is to be a tiny and often confused agency amidst many other forces” (Sharp 2007, 740). Consequently, the journalist within the radio assemblage should be read as constituted by the multiple forces pressing upon this identity, including gender, race, technology, and cultural production.

To continue from the previous chapter’s archival research into the program *From our own Correspondent*, preliminary research was conducted into the life histories of regular contributors to the program during the period for which most, and best catalogued scripts were held in the archive: 1959-1966. As a result of this, the archive of the former BBC foreign correspondent and later ITN newsreader Leonard Parkin was located in the holdings of Barnsley City Council, having been bequeathed to them after his death in 1993. Parkin’s archive is un-catalogued, and consists of six folders, cuttings and an audio cassette of his historic recording breaking the news of the assassination of President John F Kennedy on British airwaves in November 1963. I hope to show that Parkin’s letters to his mother during this period demonstrate the prosaic lifepath of the foreign correspondent through a brief period

of unprecedented economic, political and cultural accelerations which occurred during the formative years of his career as a journalist, between 1960 and 1965. This will also serve to further illustrate the broader popular cultural context within the radio news assemblage exists, through attention to the life and milieu of one particular component within it. The chapter demonstrates a different kind of assemblage, in which history, technology, context and cultural affects are read as forces acting upon the individual, constantly working to either stabilise or de-stabilise (in this case his) identity. In this case, it will also be demonstrated that the, in this case, the identity of Parkin as a *radio* correspondent is vital to understanding the subject-as-assemblage I identify it here.

The texts in this chapter, though, are read as more than their representational surfaces. The letters contain referential networks nested within them, both real and fictional, and show the individual subject (in this case journalist) as produced by a constant interplay of the eventual, textual and technological milieu within which they find themselves. Seen this way, we can argue that the novel approaches to cultural geography implied in speculative and assemblage thinking neither requires the abandoning of human or textual agency, but rather a re-configuration of both. As I discussed in the literature review, the emergence of the foreign correspondent as a specific identity within the field of professional journalism can be located in the earlier discourses of travel writing and exploration, combined with the establishment of the public sphere as a site of the consumption and contestation of current events (Habermas, 1962). Just as the journalistic tradition implied a (theoretical) commitment to “values of objectivity, neutrality, detachment and impartiality” (Pinkerton, 2013; 440), or post-colonial critiques that have noted that the representation of the Other in journalism, just as in travel-writing, can be seen to possess a series of tropes and strategies, which function to caricature, subordinate, dominate, fetishise or otherwise exercise power over an object, individual, state or group being reported on (Spurr, 1999). The foreign correspondent is, then, the uneasy hybrid of these two cultural idiolects, allied to the structural development of print-capitalism and demand for information, from around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards; as Felix Driver puts it “(t)ravellers, as well as geographers, are becoming familiar with the idea that their business is to furnish a picture of the earth’s surface as it is, and in relation to its inhabitants” (2001, 56). The distinct identity of the

journalist also means “placing journalists in their historical and geographical contexts” and “must be supplemented by further inquiry into journalistic *tradition* or the embodied, institutionalised practices and *citational structures scripting acts of reportage*” (Farish 2001, 275 my emphasis). This speaks to the concerns of popular geopolitical analysis of texts through discourse analysis with a view to the broader popular cultural contexts within which these texts are constructed, situated and influenced.

### **7.1 Operation Grapple, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1957.**

By way of an illustration of how we could read this play of material and discursive forces coming to constitute the journalistic subjectivity within the radio assemblage, an episode from the BBC archive reveals the complexity and growing interconnectedness between the reporter and technology. It involves a logistical story of creating a reporting presence at one of the remotest geographical sites on earth to the BBC headquarters, the production of a news report under pressure to “scoop” the first news of the event, and the technical expense and vicissitudes contained therein. The event in question was the first British atomic weapons tests in 1957. By way of an introduction, and to situate the relationship between radio, technologies and the journalistic subject, Turning to the archival traces left by this event will also emphasising the relationship between the lifecourse of the correspondent and the techno-cultural assemblage. As Lambert & Lester write, “imperial subjects are more than just avatars of ideas and ideologies, they are also people whose colonial lives were cross-cut by ‘familial time, private time, the time of birth, emigration, marriage, new home and death.’” (2006, 17). To this I would reiterate that the post-imperial, journalistic subject is also cross cut by external material factors such as technology, speed and event.

The archival story begins with Anthony Lawrence’s, a senior BBC correspondent, being informed by his managers of the logistics for his assignment covering the British nuclear tests, just prior to his departure to the South Pacific. It was made clear that “Security is heavily involved so I must leave some aspects for you to

discover when you reach Honolulu by May 30<sup>th</sup>” (BBC WA 05/FN/WHW). In the months prior to this, thousands of military personnel and materiel had already been dispatched to the South Pacific in the service of the nuclear tests. The logistics of Lawrence’s report and the haste with which he was expected to work, given that he was part of a highly secreted “press pack” in competition with other organisations, is clear from the details of his brief for the story

“The story will fall into two parts – the actual explosion and the first publishable reports from those chiefly concerned. Despatches on the first part will be flown to Christmas Island, where a cable and Wireless transmitter will send them on to their destinations. If at all possible, we should like you to send your story in cable form, by this means. But you should also put your piece in voice on tape. Brigadier Jehu, of the Ministry of Supply, has undertaken to make every effort to have this flown to Honolulu for onward transmission by circuit from there.”(BBC WAC: 05/FN/AHW: 17<sup>th</sup> May 1957)



*Fig.28 Operation Grapple: Universal Newsreel (Creative Commons)*

“The second part of the story will stem from a press conference, probably at Christmas Island H.Q., at which the aircraft crew, if involved, and the boffins will say all they are able to say. Press despatches will presumably be put on the cable and wireless route, and you should cable us a story by this means. But your main effort should be to get interviews or statements on your tape recorder, for transmission

from Honolulu. I understand the party will be flown back there immediately but you may think it wise to make whatever tentative arrangements you can to get your tape flown ahead of you just in case you are held up...Give all possible information on the tapes themselves, and if you can, pare your output down to fit into the 10 minute period for which we must pay anyway. Give us as much as you can within the 10 minutes, but try to make every word tell. If you keep the average length of the interviews and statements to 90 seconds or so, we can cut as may be necessary this end, and ring the changes in our various outlets.”(Letter to Anthony Lawrence, BBC WAC)

Lawrence here produces his report with the facilitation of the military establishment, then chases his cables and tapes between isolated South Pacific Islands. These events stand as further evidence of the collection of political and geopolitical data (or news), circulated back to centres of calculation and re-transmitted, re-circulated and absorbed into knowledge systems, and stored in archives. Like Kurt Huber and his receiver, a seemingly lonely conduit nonetheless connected to and constituted within a network of transmission spaces of radio and the vicissitudes of Cold War spatial politics created by the set despatched from London, Huber and Lawrence exist as semi-conductors of geopolitical events, materials and affects; as Lawrence’s briefing notes, “[w]ere it easy for you to get yourself photographed against the mushroom or some other appropriate background, that would obviously be helpful in carrying the story along in television.”(Ibid) implies that the testing of the hydrogen bomb is a demonstration of military prowess, a geopolitical boast, but only to the extent that it is either conducted in or mediated by the public sphere.

A secret nuclear test may be valuable for ensuring the bomb *works*, but secrecy is counter-productive in an arms race relying on a very public signalling of deterrence.<sup>34</sup> Lawrence’s report is embedded in this network of signalling. It is perhaps too simplistic to describe him as a tool of British military propaganda; sending a radio reporter to cover the hydrogen bomb story was, in news terms, comparable to the covering of any other technological or engineering innovation. However, the fact that the files are marked “confidential” and the secrecy which pours forth from the letters and memos relating to this trip point to the familiarity between the BBC and the military/defence establishment.

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<sup>34</sup> It bears mentioning here that this is one of the central information paradoxes of the Cold War: the dialectic between secrecy and publicity; the hyper-paranoia and shadowy conduct of Cold War intelligence existing alongside the ideological public relations battle between the superpowers.

“We understand from the Ministry of Supply that arrangements will be made to fly recorded despatches to Honolulu for onward transmission by circuit from there. It is likely, however, that material so received will be subject to a time embargo, and it may even be that the cue to release the material would first come from the London announcement that the explosion had taken place. As you know the circuits from Honolulu to London are fairly costly affairs, running to about £200 a time. Our main objective in taking this material by circuit would be to obtain first-hand information of the test with the least possible delay. It is anticipated that we will require the circuits, either for voice despatches by Mr. Lawrence or recorded material flown to Honolulu, but as I have explained I cannot at present give you dates and times. I am told that the route would be by cable to San Francisco, across the U.S.A by line, linking up with the transatlantic cable to London and that this route is available throughout the 24 hours, so that we would not be tied to any particular period of the day.”(Irene M. Illford, BBC Overseas Liaison, 21/5/1957)

There can surely be few clearer descriptions of the materiality of the radio transmission and its attendant cartographies than those described by Ms. Illford in the letter. The voice, in this case Lawrence, is engaged in species of transubstantiation into material/ephemeral electric signal, surging and chasing its way back to the centre of calculation, undergoing various changes, in competition with other signals and subject to all the pressures of machine failure, distortion, human error and signal loss. It is the occurrence of precisely such a decay and breakdown which is crystallised in a later set of despatches which I reproduce sequentially below.

“As you know, we made elaborate arrangements to receive two circuits from Honolulu carrying material from our correspondent, Anthony Lawrence, on the explosion of the British hydrogen bomb in the Pacific. The arrangement was that the local radio station in Honolulu should start arranging a circuit for a time sufficiently long after the announcement of the explosion to allow for the arrival of a tape from Lawrence by a special plane from Christmas Island...In the event, the Christmas Island plane was delayed and the tape did not arrive in Honolulu until the morning of June 1<sup>st</sup>. The local radio then went ahead with setting up a circuit and editing the tape as requested. They were just ready to go when word came through to them that London had rejected the circuit. *We can trace having issued no instruction to this effect. It will be interesting to know where it came from.*”(Tony Wigan to Miss Elford, Overseas Liaison, 18/06/1957, emphasis added)

“I have tried to trace the origin of the message received in Honolulu that London had rejected the circuit of Saturday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, but without success, as the Post Office have no knowledge of it. In any case, it does seem unlikely that the Post Office would have rejected the circuit as they had been alerted and were making particular efforts to help. The only suggestion is that the erroneous message that London had rejected the circuit, was originated due to some misunderstanding at one of the switching centres en route, probably in the States, and when received at Honolulu was thought to have originated in London. Incidentally, A.T. & T. have reported that Honolulu initiated the setting up of a circuit early in the morning of June 1<sup>st</sup> and then shortly afterwards sent a cancellation, presumably owing to the non-arrival of the tapes. *It may be that this false start reduced confidence in the whole operation*”(Bale to Elford, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1957, BBC WAC, emphasis added)

Just as for Jane Bennett's agentic assemblage of the electrical grid outage on the US Eastern seaboard as much as Latour's ARAMIS, the central tenet of a networked ontology of things tends away from the establishment of linear causation and agency in favour of the realization of the world as interconnected yet messy, complex but not united; so often ready-at-hand but always on the edge of emerging into dysfunctional presence. The logistics of covering Operation Grapple brings the archival assemblage I have been describing full circle, showing how, despite being furnished with some of the best available radio technologies of the time, the power of geography to re-assert itself, either in the form of the breakdown of smooth running information transmissions or the brute force of Euclidian distance speaks out from the archive. If the identity of the foreign correspondent is bound up with the travel writer and consequently the pilgrim or sacred traveller of the Middle Ages, then similar secular dangers and limitations are constantly present for the modern journalist-traveller, albeit within far more complex networks, with even greater possibilities for failure (and success).

With this in mind, I will now turn to a further contextualisation of the professional journalistic subject within the BBC radio assemblage during the Cold War period, as a way of situating the subject-body of the chapter proper, before moving on to how the letters of Leonard Parkin can, through the hybrid theoretical framework, be seen to illustrate both the material and discursive forces which act to shape this subjectivity.

## **7.2 The travel writers of tomorrow: BBC Foreign Correspondents in early Cold War period.**

*“Geographical discovery in John Locke’s phrase, ‘enlarged the sphere of contemplation’, that field of knowledge which blended observational enquiry with metaphysical speculation. For European states coming to power through overseas and imperial trade, it opened a series of spaces—domestic, national global—through which life stories were plotted” (Daniels & Nash 2000, 453)*

*“We do not lack facts here; we lack qualified interpretations.” –*  
(LP/01/11/1964)

To understand Leonard Parkin’s professional identity, before we engage in a detailed discussion of the prosaic assemblages of foreign news his letters communicate, it is necessary to trace the professional milieu from which he emerged. The business of foreign news is, for the individual entering the profession, far more a process of learning through the tutelage (active or passive) of more experienced colleagues than a system of examinations, gatekeepers to be overcome or institutions to navigate. Informal processes of advancement such as this are heavily conditioned by social factors such as race, gender and class. Parkin had been previously employed as a reporter on the *Yorkshire Evening Post* prior to his appointment at the BBC on the *Panorama* program. As middle class, white, male freemason in his late 20’s, he fit into a particular mould of BBC reporter hired in around the 1950’s and yet was drawn from a wider social milieu than the highly patrician, Oxbridge circles of the first generation of post-war foreign correspondents such as Charles Wheeler, Gerald Priestland and Douglas Stuart. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, in the period immediately following the Second World War, the BBC had established for itself significant latitude both with the government and public opinion to retain its status as the pre-eminent broadcaster in the UK, and a widely respected and trusted source of information. Consequently, the BBC’s expansion in the post-war years sought (amongst other aims) to bolster its capacity to cover world affairs through the employment of more foreign correspondents, improved infrastructure and manpower. As the previous chapters also illustrated, the manner in which the BBC was able to expand its foreign news portfolio was considered by managers to be vital to the future of the organisation, not only in terms of its relevance as a media actor but also as a soft-power weapon in the information battles of the Cold War, whether this was for the purposes of broadcasting externally to “vulnerable” areas of the non-aligned or post-colonial world, or for the purposes of cultivating domestic populations through the production of radio programs such as *FooC*.

As the media sociologist Phillip Schlesinger writes, “[t]he war stimulated significant developments in techniques of radio news reporting and presentation. Until 1939, virtually all ‘news’ was conveyed in the bulletin form, a monologue recitation by

anonymous announcers, although occasionally on-the-spot reports and 'news talks' were included. There was virtually no news-gathering; the first major break with this style coming with the news programme format of *Radio Newsreel*" (1978, 30). The "news explosion" of the 1950's and 1960's occurred in the context of the BBC's stratified notion of the audience: as a series of more-or-less class-based categories hierarchized by degrees of cultural refinement; categories through which audience members were to be encouraged to ascend (Briggs, 1970). This, as the previous chapter has shown, created an ecology in which the radio medium could be put into contact with these audience typologies to create new formats of programs such as *FootC*, to which Parkin was a contributor. The BBC's then chairman Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, described this system of acculturation as a central task of defining the "key" audience of the BBC, which was considered to be "the three million comprising Britain's 'elite', who were identified as university and grammar-school educated readers of *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*"(cited in Schelsinger 1978, 32). Audience typologies such as this cannot, then, be extricated from "presenter" typologies. If the categories for listeners dictate certain levels of refinement or mode of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979) then styles of broadcast talk must, similarly, speak to those typologies. There was a distinct standard to which all presenters "on air" were required to be held: regional accents were strictly forbidden in favour of Received Pronunciation (RP) as well as other stylistic dictats on how events, particularly those with a violent or traumatic element, were they to be reported, eschewing tabloid sensationalism in favour of basic factual information. Underlying this was an implicit assumption that no matter how much goodwill the BBC had accumulated, it still existed by the grace of the British establishment and the government of the day; as such, a deference to the government's viewpoint within the BBC's current affairs output prevailed in the immediate post-war period.

A defining event for the BBC during the mid-1950's, and one which perhaps did the most to steer its course away from implicit deference to the government of the day and towards a more robust independence, was its coverage of the disastrous British invasion of Suez in 1956. The news division, during this crisis, took a conscious editorial decision to report dissenting views under the right of reply to the Prime Minister Anthony Eden's narrative of the necessity and righteousness of the Suez invasion, something which would have been unthinkable ten years previously (Miller

1990; Shaw 1995). Even after this development of editorial independence however, the attitude of BBC news to the purpose and status of journalists as individuals or recognisable subjects was dismissive; the BBC's head of news, Tahu Hole, described as "A man of rigid views on the sanctity of news" held the view that reporting should remain "undefiled by such things as persons' (Schlesinger 1978, 37). Hole's presence in the editorial structure enforced an attitude that journalists as *individual subjects* should be neither seen nor heard. This is the presentation of news read as a quasi-sacred duty, a duty not to be debased by interpretation or editorialising. The importance of this is clear when we consider the cultural history of the travel writer as located in a kind of secular pilgrimage. The view of certain news organisations in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly the BBC, was predicated on a view of the presentation of current affairs, and journalism in general as a noble profession and, consequently, fits within this schema.

One of the key ways in which individual subjects are constituted in relation to wider socio-material assemblages is through their organisational identities. This is particularly true of journalists and journalism, as media organisations place great currency on credibility and must position themselves and the individual components of their operations as possessed of an organisational identity and values that speak to this currency. The idea of organisational identity has traditionally been utilised to refer to the way in which individual journalists are facilitated or constrained in their agency by structural factors.

Media studies in this area have pointed to the ways in which these identities are often implicitly gendered, in both the implicit and explicit iterations of organizational values. One example of this has been pointed to in relation to the implied difference between different sub-genres of journalism, for example, between the "masculine" values of objectivity, detachment and critical distance implied in political journalism and the "feminine" values of involvement, loyalty and desire to please audiences involved in, for example, lifestyle journalism (Van Zoonen 1998, 123). More importantly for our purposes here though, "[g]ender is also one of the determining forces in journalists' identities and their texts" (Van Zoonen Ibid, 127)

The gendering of war reporting, for example is one way in which journalism is bound up with ideas of gendered subjectivity, particularly in the television era, although

these critiques have erred towards caricature at points, with one media critic suggesting that:

“The world’s war zones are chock-a-block with would-be Kate Adies risking their lives for minor stations in the hope of landing the big story because they know that what the major networks want is a front-line account from a (preferably pretty) woman in a flack jacket’ (quoted in Gallagher, 1996: 2).”

This kind of gendered reading is a simplification of the issue at hand and clearly predicated on one version of the editorial motivations and visual dynamics of television war reporting. Contrastingly, Gerard O’Tuathail (1996) has pointed to how the *Guardian* journalist Maggie O’Kane’s writings during the Bosnian war, where the traditional geopolitical view “from no-where” was challenged by reporting of the visceral chaos and embodied subjectivity engaged by the realities of war. Such a journalistic technique, O’Tuathail argues, is an explicitly feminist challenge to the implied “masculine” journalistic values illustrated above and also serves as an accusation, to the “virtues” of detachment and objectivity of foreign policymaking elites.

The Cold War radio assemblage seen through the BBC is possessed of a similar yet distinct set of issues around subjectivity. If the journalistic subject was, for senior editors such as Tahu Hole, to be neither seen nor heard, then there was also no question of the fact that this subject should be implicitly male. Whilst received pronunciation and other stylistic codes structuring broadcast talk did not specifically exclude women from the microphone at the BBC, the assumption that the female voice was to be reserved for specific program types, where only male announcers and particularly journalists had the necessary gravitas to broadcast on issues of importance. Consequently the admittance of certain subjects into the foreign news ecologies of the radio assemblage was predicated from the start on gender identity; the technical apparatus of the microphone and broadcasting equipment being reserved by editors for male bodies and voices

Where the focus of media production elites on the gendering of the journalistic identity rested on the ways in which “feminine” subjectivities might compromise the objective “telling” of news, little attention was paid to the way in which the multiple forces pressing on the identity of the journalist might act upon his constitution as a professional subject. Parkin’s letters to his mother are important both for the

private/domestic face of the journalist, but also for their regularity during a crucial period not only for his career but also in twentieth century history. The current understanding of journalists as agents or as having agentic capacities in geopolitics generally rests on studies into the most notable, significant or ubiquitous broadcasters or broadcast organisations. However, much like any history focussing only on leaders, senior diplomats or “leading” figures in other professional elites, a certain degree of nuance is lost through reading elites as homogenous. As we see in the previous chapter, the reports of some of Parkin’s contemporaries in *FooC* illustrate how diplomatic summits, for example, require hundreds, thousands even, of “ordinary” members of these elites: civil servants, press officers, translators, stenographers (within the official spaces) and even more journalists, reporters, security personnel etc... in “unofficial” spaces. The “ordinary” work of geopolitical world construction which has been correctly identified by scholars of popular culture and geopolitics is usually carried out by the most “ordinary” of individuals, who are far from familiar household names, even within the spheres of acculturation identified by news and current affairs audience analysis. However, these “ancillary” geopolitical subjectivities, as Cynthia Enloe (2000) has argued, are often specifically gendered, with the roles of women (as diplomatic wives or sex workers for example) are rarely discussed or considered worthy of import.

To attend to these quotidian or unremarkable individuals and their construction of and participation in the world historical moments they do/did is to attend to what Nigel Thrift has termed the “little things” of geopolitics and the geopolitical. Thus whilst literal transcription of the world as discourse productive and discourse producing is valuable, “this exercise...leaves out a lot of the ‘little things’ – ‘mundane’ objects like files, ‘mundane’ people like clerks and mundane worlds like ‘the’ – which are crucial to how the geopolitical is translated into being” (Thrift 2000, 380). Mundane people like Parkin: “beat” correspondents, filing stories which may never be used or little heard but still engage and enact the process of world-construction are, then, still relevant. In a very real sense, the unremarkable professional subject is as much a component of foreign news as the scripted programming or relay stations enabling its broadcast I have discussed in previous chapters. I argue here that, for me at least, the human subject should not disappear from our analysis, far from it. Rather, that this subjectivity should be recognised as

just one among many of the “little things” whose real and virtual capacities enable the production of “the news” of world affairs. Crucially too though, the way in which we read the humans subject in light of materialist considerations must also reflect existing discursive insights into both the contingency of this subjectivity but also the ways in which different kinds of identities such as gender are privileged at different times in the constitution of these subjectivities.

### 7.3 The Modern Correspondent and Technology: Between the Lines

In the first instance, Parkin’s correspondence is filled with references to material technological objects of the time, both in the context of the professional’s broadcasting identity and the social life of everyday consumption practices. Just as it has been argued that objects within televisual texts are as much objects as the texts themselves so I argue the same applies to this narrative archive. Where recent forays into the political geography of cultural texts such as fictional television programs has recently argued for the force-full capacities of the objects at their centre, such that, for example, “*The Wire* is a metaphysical heuristic, a device for discovery, a site for determining how objects come into political force”(Meehan et al, 2013: 4), Parkin’s letters are a social history, an intertextual fact/fictional reference-network, a series of (private) affective postcards from world-historical moments; also within though, there buzzes the presence of the “modern” domestic technologies beginning to emerge at the peak of the Fordist mode of production, Cold War rivalry and American (capitalist) pre-eminence. These domestic objects are also not necessarily all “political” in the commonly understood sense.

“We are now the owners of a superb stereophonic gramophone, hi-fi and all that. I had been trying to persuade myself to buy one for some time and I did, even though it was vastly expensive. It’s a model that we shall be able to use in England. It is portable in that when the lid is on and the two speakers are clipped to the side it looks like a piece of luggage. I was given a couple of records in a Dixieland jazz club in Dallas the other night so this made up my mind for me. Now we shall be able to make a collection of discs which are extremely cheap over here...The tone of the speakers is marvellous and the whole thing is beautifully neat.”(LP/23/02/1964)

The identification of cultural and social difference *within* the euro-American self that I developed through the analysis of some of the *FooC* reports in the previous chapter emerge again here in Parkin’s letters. This time between the remnants of social and economic austerity Parkin associates with Britain: the difficulties of obtaining a

telephone, for example, under the British telecommunications monopoly of the post-war era (which remains, socio-culturally, a standing joke) as contrasted with the hyper consumption of American capitalism

“The telephone is a laugh. You know, in England you have to go down on bended knee to get a telephone and then it’s likely to take about six months. Here it is different. I telephoned the company on Monday. They said they would install Friday (that’s today) and suggested we had four telephones!”(LP/30/08/1963)

Alongside this is Parkin’s residual British attitude of austerity, of repair, of “make-do and mend”, jarring against the paradoxical American “prudence” of planned obsolescence, disposal and re-purchase: “Things are expensive but you must remember that Americans have more money to spend than people in England. Things like TV sets, fridges and washing machines are relatively cheap. When they break down they get another because “service” for anything is vastly expensive” (LP/12/10/1963). So in terms of the cultural history of technology, the tools of his trade are not the only technological forces and object systems which circulate through the letters: the domestic experience of “the world of tomorrow” engendered in the cultural atmospherics of the 1960’s are a constant presence. There is a distinction here too, between the ways in which these technologies shape Parkin’s domestic or personal subjectivity as opposed to other technologies that shape his *professional* subjectivity.



Fig.29 Telstar Satellite, 1962

The *Telstar* satellite (Fig.29) was launched in 1960 as the next generation of telecommunications satellite, capable of transmitting telephone, telegraph, telephoto, and facsimile transmissions through signal amplification via a base station in Andover, Maine and relay stations in Brittany and Cornwall. *Telstar's* non-geosynchronous orbit meant that it had a transmission window of 20 minutes in each 2 ½ hour orbit period. *Telstar* opened the possibilities for live or near-live transmissions, whereas radio had previously relied on circuit bookings, phone transmission, or pre-recorded packages sent on tape by air freight (of which more later). Reading the growing importance of *Telstar* through Parkin's letters (it is mentioned more frequently in later correspondence), we can see that the changing technological ecology of the 1960's (in which advances were seemingly made every day) was constantly present in the tradecraft of the correspondent, and Parkin, given his relative youth in the profession, seemingly realised it's importance. The wave trajectories of *Telstar* also mimic the experimental lines of flight in Marconi's transmissions, which were conducted between Poldhu in Cornwall and Signal Hill, St John's, Newfoundland on 1901. A generation later, and the vector of the transmissions now travelled through space, but crucially, *from* the United States, *to* Europe. Parkin's private musings on the *Telstar*, though, reveal a certain anxiety towards the dissolving of "traditional" modes of distance and co-presence, in a later letter of 1964 when he has been despatched to New York to cover the US administration's reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which ultimately sparked full American involvement in the Vietnam War. He describes, here, an "atmosphere of crisis";

"Tony Wigan is on holiday this month so I came up to New York partly to cover the United Nations end of the story and mainly to take advantage of any passes there might be of the communications satellites, *Telstar* and relay. I did a short piece over *Telstar* yesterday which I hope you were able to see. What an eerie feeling it is that you are sitting in a studio in New York, looking into the lens of a camera. The picture is going up into space and reappearing amongst my old friends in Alexandra Palace in London! I suppose the day will come when we shall think of it all as normal, but it is still wonderful to me...I must say I always enjoy New York – I find these soaring skyscrapers rather inspiring."(LP/6/08/1964)

This feeling is echoed later, when after covering the election of Lyndon Johnson in November of 1964, he writes

“I wondered when I was doing the Telstar pass I did into the 6 o Clock news last Wednesday whether you were watching by some lucky chance. If you were you saw me in the flesh because I went “live” into the programme. Ain’t science marvellous?!”  
(LP/6/10/1964)

The technological optimism of the 1960’s reverberates in the margins of Parkin’s letters. Perhaps more than most professions, journalism became affected by the rapid changes wrought by these technological advances. The functionality of these networks and technical assemblages, however, are often taken for granted, whether this is at the bureaucratic or juridical level or that of the individual subject. Both Parkin, and certain components of the FooC texts emphasise the effectiveness and power of distance collapsing technologies and yet as we know, these technologies and infrastructures are constantly balanced on the edge of dysfunction, a significant web of associations and withdrawn components supporting their functionality. This was even more the case during the periods where radio communications technologies such as the relay or *Telstar* were new. As he would later write, during his secondment to Congo, the uneven global distribution of communication technologies is illustrated starkly: “Money just seems to be meaningless here. I sent a message of about three hundred words to London by Telex last night and it cost 1800 francs – about £14. Still, I suppose the words had a long way to travel”  
(LP/25/04/1960).

#### **7.4: Canada, 1960**

Having discussed the enduring presence of the material objects of radio in Parkin’s archive, the remainder of this chapter engages his letters chronologically, in order to map Parkin as a journalistic subject, an individual agent within the wider. Parkin’s career, or at least the section of his career covered by this chapter, is mapped in the figure below and constructed from the postal markings of his letters and the correspondent postings he is known to have held at the time, along with places explicitly referenced in the text of the letters. Individual, de-contextualised letters appear from Australia in 1956, on headed paper from a Melbourne hotel, referencing him covering the Olympic games; another from Istanbul in 1957, and one from

Budapest in 1959. The regular, episodic correspondence he begins with his mother, however, begins in early 1960, from Ottawa, Canada, before a series of letters from Congo in 1961, followed by the resumption of his career in North America, from Washington DC beginning in 1963. A visual cartography of Parkin's different locations illustrated from the postmarks of his letters is illustrated in *fig.30 below*



*Fig.30 Parkin's trajectories, 1958-1966, as mapped from his letters. (Map by the Author/Google Maps)*

Parkin's letters give an insight into this aspect of his journalistic identity: as a junior correspondent, he operates at the peripheries, the "unglamorous" low-profile end of the foreign news spectrum. His reports are not always broadcast, and probably rarely listened to when they are. This feeling is confirmed later in 1960, when he writes "There is not much news about in Canada, not with the stuff that makes the headlines in competition with the Congo and Cuba. But I keep sending stories of

one sort and another on tape and I'm told some of them are being used."

(LP/09/08/1960). Beginning in Ottawa, Parkin though has frequent excursions, both professional and personal to other parts of Canada and to the Eastern seaboard of the United States in the period between 1960 and 61. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1961 Parkin wrote from the Hotel Berkshire in New York

"I've been in New York for five days and I've been absolutely fascinated. Although I've seen pictures of New York many times and know more or less what to expect, I was not prepared for the size of the skyscrapers and the number of them. At night they are just great cliffs of steel and concrete sparkling with thousands of lights. A searchlight on top of the Empire State Building sweeps over them all as if to prove its claim to be the highest building in the world...The United Nations Building itself is magnificent, a 39 floor cliff of green glass and white marble, seething with every colour and language the world has and always busy"(LP/23/07/1961)

His first trip to New York is inflected with the optimism of early 1960's America, the monumental architecture of capitalism embodied by the Manhattan skyline. The progress of this period is scaled in terms of minimisation as well as maximisation, though. In the same letter Parkin writes, "I bought myself a transistor radio this morning. It weighs only 6 ounces, stands 4 1/2" high – it's about the size of a packet of cigarettes. It will be useful for picking up news bulletins, which is the main reason I wanted a small radio."(LP/23/07/1961)) This view of American prosperity and technological development was far from peripheral to the Cold War discourses of the time. American cultural diplomacy in the 1960's, after all, sought to advance the view that for the USA "Our technology is for us only a means to an end, not an end in itself...only a means to a greater humanism" (Schwoch 2009, 102).

During the early part of his work in in Ottawa, Parkin marvels at the internal boundary-producing practices of language and culture. "This duality, this existence of French and English people developing separately in a single Canadian state is one of the astonishing things about Canada."(LP/18/06/1960) Later, he ventures to Resolute Bay in the Canadian Arctic to cover the Northern Territories parliament. The letters from this trip reveal The Arctic as the liminal space it is argued to be in travel writing discourses; ambiguous and incommensurable, "littered with the bodies of Western travellers" (Holland & Huggan 1998, 100) but also, "(s)uspended between water and land...Overspilling the boundaries scientists have sought to impose on it, the arctic is apt to confound even the most meticulous observers, reminding them of

the gap that separates what they see from what they *wish* to see” (Ibid). The Arctic as seen by Parkin, though, is an enjambment of various masculine colonial identities; the, amateur anthropologist, the professional tourist or polar explorer.

“I was fascinated by the Arctic. We had snow one day in Resolute Bay...24 hours of sunshine. It was strange to be taking colour pictures at midnight...the Eskimos are just like all the pictures and drawings I’ve ever seen of them; smiling moon-faced, happy little creatures and very friendly...seeing them in the arctic sunshine was not to see them at their best. They are cold weather livers(sic)...the arctic landscape is brown and desolate with no trees and very little vegetation of any kind. There are a few scattered wild flowers which have a short life but in the main there is nothing. But it is true that hundreds of feet below the permanently frozen soil there is oil...Yellowknife is the gateway to all this vastness, and even life there is tough...New York will be a tremendous contrast after all this. Although I would have liked a day or two here to catch up on some correspondence I’m glad I shall now be seeing it. I sent one or two pieces to London on the Arctic but I don’t know whether any of them has been used” (LP/24/06/1960)

Later, he writes of visiting the Canadian interior presenting an interesting, perhaps unintentional reflexivity in his journey when he says “[s]pending a few days in Toronto before going westwards to Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. I want to look in on the Canadian National Exhibition here which is a very big affair.”(LP/23/08/1960). Here, the traveller/correspondent attends the national exhibition, before embarking on the journey *as exhibition*, the raw substance of news. Once again, the exhibition fulfilled an important role in the cultural diplomacy of the Cold War era, more directly in the exhibitions in the US and Moscow in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, which were designed from the outset to be fed into the reporting ecologies of Parkin and his contemporaries.



*Fig. 31 Dufferin Gate, Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, 1960. Archives of Ontario, Canadian Government Travel Bureau.*

Journalism is a profession where patterns of motion are constantly subject to change; where news and events are resistant to diaries, itineraries and schedules. Parkin's plan to take in the exhibition of Canada on an East-West journey was frustrated by demands to cover two events, both archetypal of the atmospherics of the early 1960's.

"All my plans have been changed. As you know I was to go out to the west coast. However there was a highly technical nuclear physics conference taking place at Kingston (you can find it on your map on Lake Ontario) this week and I had to leave Toronto on Tuesday and go there. I came from Kingston by bus to Ottawa this morning and I'm catching a plane out again this evening to go to Bonneville Salt Flats in the United States to watch Donald Campbell's attempt on the world Lands speed record...I have to go to Chicago and stay the night tonight and then catch the morning plane to Salt Lake city. Bonneville is about 100 miles further on. I think it will be a fascinating assignment and of course it's another opportunity to see something of the United States. I think that when that assignment is over (about 12th September) I shall make for Vancouver straight away and come back eastwards across Canada"(LP/02/09/1960).

The two events he discusses here are instructive of the popular cultural context and atmospherics of the time: an international conference on nuclear physics and an attempt to break the world land speed record; events both paradigmatic of human

attempts to achieve world closure, the instrumentalising tendencies of technology, the will to speed, the maximisation of the transference of bodies through space. It is often cited that the idea of humanity (as theological construct) was destroyed by the end of the Second World War, in the *lagers* of Auschwitz and Belsen (e.g. Adorno, 1982; Cohen, 1981). This is to ignore, though, the secular faith in the abstractions of science and technology. In what Heidegger saw as the “danger” of the technological worldview, many continued to see a capacity for transcendence.



*Fig 32 Donald Campbell in “Bluebird CN7”  
Bonneville Salt Flats: September 1960 (Press Association).*

Campbell’s attempt on the land-speed record at the Bonneville Salt Flats ended in a serious crash, after he lost control of the car at 360mph. It was widely agreed that the structural integrity of his vehicle saved his life. Parkin’s bearing witness to this event is reflected in a letter sent on 17<sup>th</sup> September “[t]his (yesterday) was the day when Campbell had his unfortunate crash. You would hear a lot about it on BBC News programmes and I was responsible for it. I had the news of the crash (Campbell) out to the news service in England sooner than any other news service in the world and *although I was very very sorry this happened it is a stimulating feeling to have beat the world on a story.*”(LP/17/09/1960) This elation, however, is belied by the disconnection and nomadic professional identity: “You could write to me at the address on this letter—but do so quickly won’t you or I may have moved again. This is a will-o-the-wisp existence - pleasant but a bit rootless”(LP/17/09/1960). Parkin

returns some weeks later to New York to cover the arrival of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the United Nations,

“I went to see a film the other evening called *the Entertainer*. Lawrence Olivier plays a failure of a music hall hack and the whole film is very evocative of the seediness of seaside digs and the crumbling decay of that type of theatre. I went to the film after a reception given by the Ethiopian delegation to the United Nations at which comrade Khrushchev put in an appearance. I thrust myself forward to have a word with him – asked him when he is going back which is the one question to which most people in New York would be pleased to know the answer. He made the stock reply – in the New Year, but I’m not saying which New Year. He’s got a small pudgy hand and it’s rather like shaking a piece of cold suet. I should think the New York Police will be glad to see the back of him. He sets them a tidy security problem. It must be years since there was so much siren wailing as the convoys of cars streak through the streets bringing parties to the United Nations building and taking them away again. The policemen here are a scruffy, unsmiling lot...but in spite of this, so long as you have the right credentials, they are very helpful towards pressmen”(LP/7/10/1960).

*The Entertainer* Parkin refers to in the letter was a film adaptation of John Osborne’s play of the same name, written three years earlier. Archie (played by Olivier in the film), a failed, alcoholic theatre impresario is trapped in an old world, unable to reconcile himself to the slow death of music-hall as a popular mode of British entertainment. As his life disintegrates, Archie’s wife tries to convince the family to move to Canada to manage one of her brother-in-law’s hotels. As they argue, she paints the picture of the possibility of a different life, away from Britain.

“**Phoebe:** Here, this is what she says: she talks about us coming out, and paying our fare, etc., and then the job in Ottawa. Experience isn’t necessary; it’s having your own people. She says: “We have a twenty one inch T.V. set, a radio, etc. and now we have a 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air car complete with automatic shift and all the fancy gadgets everyone goes in for over there. I’m quite sure that you and Archie would settle down in no time, and everything would work fine.” (*She folds the letter up carefully.*) I thought you’d like to hear what she said.”(Osborne 1957,68)

In *The Entertainer*, the irrelevance and desuetude of vaudeville and music-hall culture is taken as a metaphor for the decaying edifice of late 1950’s Britain; austerity, the cloying sensibilities of ‘small c’ conservatism; deferral to authority as a matter of course; rigid structures of culture and cultural value. The letter in John Osborne’s play and film (a fictional space) mirrors parts of the narrative from Parkin’s letters (“real” space). Do we presume too much if we imagine his viewing of the film and seeing parallels with his own life; An Englishman abroad, surprised – beguiled

even – by the brash architecture and bountiful consumerism of North America at the turn of the 1960's? His letters certainly reflect precisely the sentiments articulated by the character of Phoebe in Osborne's play: a young man taken with the opening up of the world offered by his profession, not only surrounded by but moving through an accelerating world of information, materials and events the juxtaposition of the film with talk of the Ethiopian delegation to the United Nations; New York and Nikita Khrushchev, for example. This is not the only cinematic reference found within Parkin's letters during this period though. On 29<sup>th</sup> October for example, he writes "I saw a couple of films this week. One of them was called *Psycho*. You must **not** under any circumstances go to see it. It has a brand of frightening horror worse than anything I have ever seen before and it will not do you any good" (LP/29/10/1960). The irony of this statement is palpable: Parkin had covered the violent insurrections in Algeria "[i]t seems strange that I shouldn't be in Algiers for this one as I've been there for the previous two insurrections" (LP/25/04/1961), and yet seems unusually perturbed by the (representational) violence of Hitchcock's film and, moreover, it's potential impact on his mother, yet another illustration perhaps, of the manner in which the professional identity of the journalist, to censor distasteful details of violence, diffuses into the private identity of the subject. To (self) censor in such a way feeds back into the notion of the male journalistic identity as being at least in part predicated not only on the performative demonstration and communication of information but also to shield the domestic audience from the unpleasant vicissitudes of international politics. It also once again illustrates the power of various forms of cultural affectivity (rather than simply discursive constructions) to act upon, and produce, in this case, journalists covering the geopolitical.

## 7.5 Congo, 1961

Parkin's posting in Canada as mapped in the letters ends abruptly in the Autumn of 1960, with the next correspondence dated early 1961 with letters postmarked from Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), Congo (now DRC), where it appears he had been sent on a short secondment. As there are no biographical notes to compare the letters to, and no personnel file made available by the BBC, the life history with which this chapter is, at least in part, concerned must remain fragmentary, and aware of its own limitations.

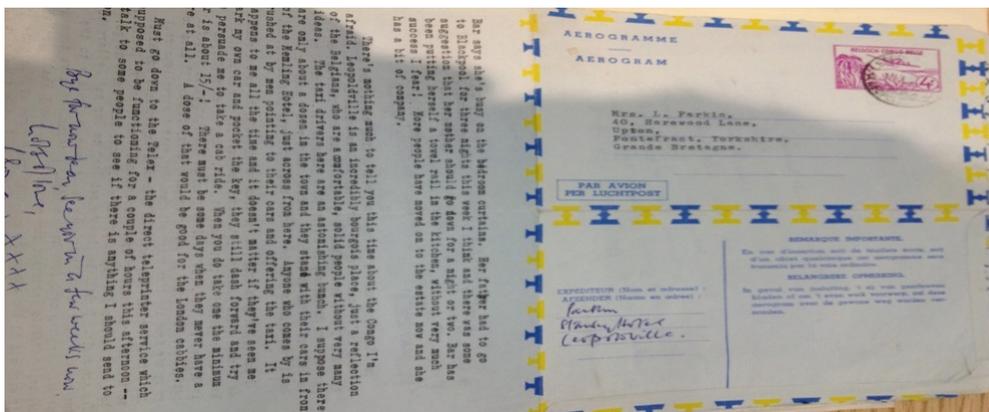


Fig.33 Parkin's letter from Congo, 1961. Photograph by the author, Barnsley local studies archive.

*"Here I am half way through the third week in the Congo...The mail does arrive but one can't expect too much of a country like this." (LP/11/04/1961)*



Fig 34. Hotel Stanley, Leopoldville/Kinshasha, Congo/DRC (C.1920)

*“The Congo, in fact I think the whole of the Equatorial belt, has a curiously limiting effect on the mind. Everything seems to take longer to do than it does in crisper air of Europe and it’s a great effort to read anything “heavier” than paperback mysteries.”(LP/18/05/1961)*

Parkin’s transfer for a brief four month period working in Congo seems to have occurred early in 1961, although the first of his letters does not appear until March. This was a febrile period in the newly independent Congo, around the time of the murder of Patrice Lumumba by Belgian/ US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed rebels from the secessionist Eastern province of Katanga. No direct mention of these events is made in his letters, although it cannot have escaped his mind, given that the year earlier when in Canada he had been sent at short notice to cover Lumumba’s visit to Ottawa immediately following his election to request francophone technical assistance for the country. The tone of his letters is markedly different than previous communications, and almost explicitly following in the textual footsteps of previous white, colonial writers in its utilisation of the climate to explain the population.

“The last night we had the best example anyone can remember of a tropical storm. Certainly I have never seen anything like it before. It had been pretty hot and sunny all day and then in the early evening the weather began to brood. The sky and whole atmosphere over the wide river Congo turned first a slate grey and then an unnatural purple-pink. There was no wind, the palm trees between the buildings were still and the birds had stopped flying around. You could almost feel the stillness. Then it started. As it got dark, great sheets of lightening began to flash over the city, the thunder cracked deafeningly every few minutes, and suddenly it began to rain. You have never imagined rain like in your life. It just hurled itself down and bounced a foot high from the streets and lightening was so intense that you could see every detail outside for the split second each flash lasted. It was beautiful in a way, an illustration of *what a raw, savage country* this can be. The storm lasted until about four ‘o clock this morning, just went on without ceasing. Lots of people just stood about the hotel watching in sheer amazement. There were floods this morning all over the city, especially in the Cite Indigene, the native city. The water in the hotel was cut off. I went out smelling like a jungle orchid after having had to shave in eau de Cologne!” (LP/11/04/1961)

Here, landscape, climate and the intertext of colonial travel accounts collides with “modern” journalistic frame, still unable to encounter Africa in any other mode than through the overtly sensual, animalistic-animistic-temporally Other. This resonates with the panoramic scripting of *FooC* discussed in the previous chapter, but also

contrasts with the infrastructural textuality expressed in the surveys of the civil servants and BBC staff in the first chapter, who are concerned with the strictly geometric, gridded engineering landscapes and sightlines; precisely the mindset that paradoxically informed the modern, male, imperial cartographer's gaze on the *tabula rasa* of Africa during the high period of European empires (see Hegguland, 2012)

"It's now time to be tuning in on short wave to London to hear the news and *Radio Newsreel*. It's the General Overseas Service Edition, not the one you hear, but I sometimes hear myself coming back. I expect the Congo will fade from the newspapers now that the Eichmann trial is starting in Israel...The Congo seems to have been wiped off the front pages by Cuba these days and perhaps that's not such a bad thing. What this country needs is a period in which to settle down in which it's not the focal point of world attention...I've changed my car now from that lorry of a Chrysler...to a more manageable Volkswagen –it locks too. As there's a great deal of car thieving going on here at the moment I was a bit apprehensive. I was also convinced by the smell of the car some mornings that some African or other was sleeping the night in it! The night watchmen in Leopoldville, incidentally, are interesting in themselves. Many shops have them and so do large office blocks. They sleep, or rest at any rate, on the ground outside the buildings they are supposed to be guarding and they build wood fires on the pavement or on sheets of tin. It's a sort of return to the tribal instinct, I guess. They are just about completely undressed when they settle down for the night, and their shiny, wizened black faces look very eerie in the flickering firelight"(LP/19/04/1961)

The colonial intertext emerges subliminally again, through the lens of fictional reference in one of his later letters when Parkin, after having been returned from Congo for over three years writes, sharing his thoughts on the upcoming election in the UK, held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

"It looks from here as though (Harold) Wilson is going to get in. I don't think it will be a bad thing. I'd like to see them dismantle the school system and put it back together again. So much that is rotten in English life can be laid at the door of the education system. We've got to learn to live in this century and not the last. We are no longer turning out people to go and do *Sanders of the River* jobs in the colonies – our public schools were fine for that. Now we need something else. Also the Tories (I think) have completely run out of ideas and in any case, if the two party system is going to be preserved and is to go on meaning something then one party shouldn't be kept in opposition for too long"(LP/12/10/1964)

*Sanders of the River* was a film of 1953 starring Leslie Banks and the American opera singer and civil rights activist Paul Robeson, based on a series of stories by Edgar Wallace, a war correspondent for Reuters and the *Daily Mail* during the Second Boer War. The film's plot concerns a benevolent District Commissioner in British colonial Nigeria and an African tribal chieftain. Robeson disowned the film, as the director, Zoltan Korda, reneged on a promise to portray Africans positively

(Wallace's source text ranges from patronising paternalism to overt racism in its representations), instead dedicating it to "the handful of white men whose everyday work is an unsung saga of courage and efficiency." By 1963, Robeson was retired, and living in failing health in a clinic in East Berlin. He returned to the United States later that year and lived as a recluse between Philadelphia and New York City. His lifelong belief in socialism precluded any involvement in the mainstream civil rights movement of the 1960's who demanded, as a price, that he issued a denunciation of communism and the Soviet Union. Colonialism's paternalistic ideology, though, is re-inscribed by Parkin through the lens of his profession, and the language of a jaded parent: "The Congo seems to have been wiped off the front pages by Cuba these days and perhaps that is not such a bad thing. What this country needs is a period in which to settle down in which it is not the focal point of world attention" (LP/19/04/1961). Similarly too, his seeming irritation with the privileged strata and political influence of the British public school system belies his own anxieties about his own professional subjectivity, developed despite *not* being a member of this socio-economic milieu. In this way, the force of his ethnic and gender position as a white male subject territorializes his identity within the BBC assemblage. However, he is still subjected to deterritorializing forces within this organizational identity based on another force, that of his social class, which push back.

For the writer W.G Sebald, topographic spaces, place, objects and even photographs are haunted with the memories of violence inscribed within, behind and anterior to them (see Wylie 2007). The letters provide us with something of the same, by way of an assemblage: chance mentions, references to the everyday experiences of culture, the quotidian nature of communication (by letter) is pregnant with the violences of colonialism (by which he is implicated as a British man of post-empire) and racial segregation (in which he is implicated as a witness). To identify these inter-texts and their material-semiotic connections in this way reinforces Edward Said's argument that the successful functioning of the logic of imperialism is the need to establish a regulated connectivity between the metropole and the periphery, such that "(w)hat assures the domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony of one is the productivity and discipline of the other" (Said 1993, 104). One of the things I have repeatedly suggested over the course of this thesis is that the geopolitics of information seen in through BBC's foreign news archives operates in

precisely this way. This is to say where at the level of both material power and textual representation, organisations and individuals work to keep the outside not simply an “alien other” but a productive space for the material and semiotic construction of the world, or worlds, *for the benefit* of the listener/audience. This claim applies equally to the surveyors and engineers around the Masirah project as it does the contributors to *FooC*, and Leonard Parkin himself. The flat-ontology of assemblage, in which all things are regarded as equally relevant to these constructions, decipherable only by reference to the effects they have allows us to read colonial literature(s) alongside aerial maps, and correspondent’s letters alongside fictions contained therein.

## 7.6: Washington DC 1963-64: Affective Atmospheres, Race and Politics



Fig.35 Leonard Parkin's House, at 3266 Aberfoyle Place, Washington DC (Image: Google Earth, 2014: triptych by author)

*“The revolutionary atmosphere Marx invokes is akin to the meteorological atmosphere in two senses; it exerts a force on those that are surrounded by it, and like the air we breathe it provides the very condition of possibility for life. Marx is not quite invoking an affective atmosphere, even though a revolutionary atmosphere must come charged with a sense of danger and promise, threat and hope”(Anderson; 2009;78)*

*“Just remember most Americans are ordinary decent people and that even the most extreme of them have been shocked to the roots of their being. But it is no use denying that there is an atmosphere here in which hateful things of this kind can happen. We can only hope that now this atmosphere will change”(LP/ 3/12/1963)*

The period on which the majority of this thesis’ archival sources has drawn (the mid 1960’s) is largely written and spoken of in mainstream culture within a variety of frames: nostalgia – often to the point of mysticism – radical progress; the overthrow (or attempted overthrow) of old orders; sexual liberation; revolutions (failed revolutions); the origins of all today’s ills (economic, demographic, ethical); technological hope (nuclear anxieties); popular cultural explosion (high cultural decay). Amidst these interpretive frames, what seems indisputable is that the social, political and cultural atmospherics of mid 1960’s America provided a vast wealth of material for the beat correspondent to cover. The confusion Parkin feels, particularly on witnessing the American attitudes to race when he begins his posting in Washington in 1963 permeates through the letters.

“Have you seen any of the stuff I’ve done from here on TV? There was one particular piece in the Negro quarter – Harlem – where I had a bit of a rough reception which went down extremely well and I gather they used a good long piece. There was a bit of amused comment in the papers. The office was tickled pink, although I wasn’t so amused at the time” (LP/07/10/1960)

Later though, when journeying further into the Southern states, the realities of racial segregation emerge into his discourse, although it is telling to note that he sees no comparison, or indeed contradiction between his sympathetic attitude to the “American Negro” and the colonial chauvinism of his earlier writings from Congo. The one consistency though, is that the existence of both Africans (in Congo) and the African Americans (in the USA) are always refracted through the lens of white experience:

*“The people are so friendly that it is difficult for a foreigner to understand their attitude towards negroes...The racial situation in Northern Virginia is nothing like so bad as it is further south in North Carolina and Alabama. It’s this southern attitude towards the American Negro that makes me wonder whether the statue of liberty isn’t just a phoney, and whether calling America the land of the free hasn’t a rather hollow ring”(LP/19/10/1960)*

This is also reflected in Parkin's coverage of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963, one of the defining moments in the struggle for civil rights. Here he writes that:

"The Great March here is over and I'm wondering whether you managed to catch any of my coverage of it. Did you see the pictures of me over Telstar yesterday? It is a remarkable experience to sit in a studio here and to hear Alexandra Palace saying "yes we can see you and hear you." It is a very expensive operation to use Telstar, but I'm told everyone in London feels it was well worthwhile. I have been working terrifically hard over the period of the march, including a 22 hour day on the day itself. There are so many different programmes to work for, so many different dispatches to do. I did manage to do some television filming gas well, which went out in the News Extra programme on Tuesday last. I do hope you managed to see or hear some of these things. The march is now in the analysis state and I've written a long piece for an early Saturday morning programme called *From our own Correspondent*, summing up the whole thing and giving a few thoughts on what is likely to happen in the future. *The march has done one main thing: it has made everybody, throughout America, make up his mind whether he is for Negro equality or whether he is against.*"(LP/30/08/1963 emphasis added)

The day of the march, less than seventy miles away from Parkin in Hagerstown, Maryland William Devereux Zantzinger, a wealthy, white tobacco farmer from Charles County, Maryland was served with a six month prison sentence and a \$500 fine after being convicted of the manslaughter (having been initially charged with murder) of an African American barmaid, Hattie Carroll, whom he had beaten with a cane at the Emerson Hotel in Baltimore in February of that year. Zantzinger's sentence was deferred until September to allow him to harvest his tobacco crop. Even in the face of the various atrocities committed during the struggle for civil rights, Parkin's shock is mediated in expression through the shock of *white* experience, alongside the reflection on the technological dynamics of his professional identity

"At last I seem to have stopped running about in small circles between here and Birmingham, Alabama. There's one thing about work for radio: at least I know where I am and what I'm doing. I've been in an absolute whirl for two weeks. I went down to Birmingham for three days and got back on Thursday September 12<sup>th</sup>. The following Sunday back I went again, this time at a moment's notice. I found Birmingham a very tense city. *The explosion at the church which killed two little Negro girls had shocked even the staunch segregationists who believe firmly in keeping white away from black.* There was panic in the air and I think street fighting could have broken out very easily. Martin Luther King was on my aircraft into the city and I was able to talk to him straight away and get a story as soon as I arrived. Telephoning London from Birmingham Alabama is easier than telephoning Scotland from home. The lines are beautifully clear. I don't know whether you heard any of my pieces from there but they were done on the telephone"(LP/21/09/1963)

The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, to which Parkin refers in his letter, took place on September 15<sup>th</sup> was another watershed in the civil rights struggle. It is curious as to why Parkin incorrectly states that two girls were killed (it was four).



Fig.36. Front page of Birmingham, AL, Post Herald, 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1963. Birmingham, AL, Public Library Digital Collections

The two letters and the referential network of affective relations they inhabit show the inflection of the affective atmospherics of the early 1960's; halfway between hope and fear, anxiety and anticipation, the collision of past, present and future. The radio correspondent acts, in Derek McCormack's (2013) language, as a "semi-conductor" of these atmospherics. McCormack's references to live sports commentary on radio in this respect is just as applicable to the role of the correspondent mediating events-*the event*-through radio. Alongside this, again, the extract shows the differential space-times enabled by the technologies available in 1960's America: that clearer communication is enabled between Alabama and London, than between provincial areas of the UK. Whilst we may not have many of Parkin's broadcasts due to a paucity of the radio archive, we can read traces of this in his correspondence: "I've been in a whirl"; "There was panic in the air". These meta-journalistic tropes also speak to the concerns of assemblage I have been discussing throughout this thesis in that they begin to express the multiplicities of time-spaces, real and fictional,

material and immaterial worlds engendered within the practice of journalism. As the recent forays into the “objecthood” of cultural texts has argued:

“Objects are not limited to a crude materiality. Like a monsoon battering an island or a bridge crossing a river, so too can a character in a novel produced new relations within the world and should not simply be discounted as ‘fictional’ or ‘unreal’ by virtues of its presumed intangibility”(Meehan et al, 2013: 3).

In these examples from Parkin’s letters, events and texts, both fictional and “real” relate as objects, acting as push and pull on the journalist (another object). The letter serves as what political geographers have identified, citing Latour, as “[i]ntermediaries – things that carry meaning or force without transformation” (Meehan et al, 2013, 5). There are additional intermediaries, too, within the letters: the texts referenced (explicitly or implicitly) within it such as *Sanders of the River*, *The Entertainer*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Psycho* etc... Other objects too, such as telephones, radio sets and the *Telstar* satellite circulate within “real” space and the textual space of the letter. The purpose of the approach I am outlining to individual biography and cultural history is that we cannot, under the radical ontology of assemblage, either reduce or derive one from the other. Transposing this once again to DeLanda’s register, each exists by virtue of the strength of their connections but also retains a material or expressive identity under the constant “push” and “pull” of forces of territorialization, deterritorialization; the coding and decoding of language. This goes to further illustrate the arguments made in the theoretical framework about how assemblage and object oriented accounts of textuality may expand on existing understandings of the relationship between journalism, technology and international politics in ways not previously considered.

## **7.7 Dallas Texas, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963 – The human-radio relay & the event**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963, US President John F Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, TX. Leonard Parkin’s voice was the first to inform UK listeners of the news. In the aftermath, after an uncharacteristic delay of several days from his last letter, his letter to his mother, written on November 25<sup>th</sup> reads of an apology

“I needn’t tell you why I haven’t been able to write before. Since Friday’s tragic news from Dallas I have been in action almost constantly and I have no doubt you will have heard or seen some of the coverage I have done...I was on the air almost constantly...in the six hours- news bulletin after news bulletin, TV as well as sound. It was a tough job to have to do and a tragic one. But this is the life one has to lead as a journalist. One has to stand aside and report the tragedy of others and one cannot get emotionally involved”. (LP/ 25/11/1963)

Parkin struggles though, with what could be thought of as the first example of a mass-mediated trauma in the age of the image, confessing that:

“In this case I must say I felt it difficult not to (cry), there were times when I saw that brave wife and Kennedy’s two children when there were tears in my eyes. She stayed with her husband’s body almost constantly from his death to his burial and she won my admiration I must say.”(Ibid)

This opens up the an interesting differential, and one which I discussed in my earlier review on the manner in which news-media and journalists either emote or repress, depending on the representational context, this speaks also to the earlier discussion regarding the professional subjectivity of the journalist, required to avow styles of presentation seen as representing emotion, subjectivity or other supposedly “feminine” challenges to the neutral, objective detachment of the “proper” journalistic subject. Parkin’s letters demonstrate the way in which this public/private distinction of the journalistic subject is played out. The objective (as much as this is a fantasy) correspondent must displace emotion (whether this is grief, fear or anger) from the sphere of the public to the private.

There is also the more troubling question of how “grievable” life is constructed within this reporter-subject dynamic is evident here (Butler, 2004): Parkin had been (albeit only for a few months) in Congo in 1961, at the height of decolonisation, a time marked by instability and violence. Similarly, he had been in Algeria to witness the start of the insurgency against French colonial rule. These postings must have contained a significant degree of contact with what would probably have been referred to at the time as “unpleasantness” (cipher for witnessing violence or atrocity) and yet this makes no appearance in his letters. Following the assassination, Parkin was the first voice to “break” the story to British audiences. A cassette tape recording of his two-way to the BBC studio in London is held within his archive, a historic broadcast, preserved in its full materiality. The recording has been transcribed below and further demonstrates the distinction between the gendered

constructions of professional subjectivity demanded of BBC correspondents (neutral, detached, cold) with the personal subjective identity contained within the letters.

### **Parkin's famous report of the Kennedy assassination (Recording)**

*Static, noise.*

(High pitched womans voice) "*Hello Leonard...*

Hello

*You can go ahead then*

"Well as far (long) as you realise that all I've got in front of me is a pile of tape which I'm just ripping off the printer which you can probably hear in the background now, with a phone ringing as well but I'll go ahead in five seconds from now..."

*Coughs*

"Hello London this is Leonard Parkin calling radio newsreel from Washington. President Kennedy and Governor John Connally of Texas was shot today from an ambush as president Kennedy's motorcade left the centre of Dallas where the president was on a speaking tour.

Mrs Kennedy, first reports say, jumped up and grabbed her husband and cried "oh no" and the motorcade sped on. From then all was confusion. The police immediately fanned out over a wide area through the streets. People screamed and lay down on the ground as shots were heard and associated press photographer is reporting a man called Odkins said he saw blood on the president's head.

There was absolute pandemonium around the scene. The secret service men who always accompany the president waved the motorcade on at fast speed to the hospital, but even at high speed it took nearly five minutes to get the car to the ambulance entrance there. Reporters saw President Kennedy lying flat on his face on the seat of his car. Men and women were screaming. This is all we have in Washington here at this moment. And for the moment I return you to radio newsreel in London.

There were three shots. The president slumped into the car as his wife, Mrs Jacqueline Kennedy cried "oh no" and cradled his head. The secret service men immediately speeded up the motorcade to hospital as the crowd dissolved into pandemonium. The motorcade was passing through some of the biggest crowds that had turned out to see the president on this tour. Some men and women threw themselves onto the ground. In the emergency room of the hospital to which the president was rushed blood transfusions were given straight away and the call went out for more blood of the B Positive group which was the president's. But it was too late. Two catholic priests gave president Kennedy the last rights of the Catholic Church. He was the first Catholic president of the United States. He died thirty five minutes after the shooting."(Parkin, BBC Recording, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1963)

Cross-referencing this with scripts from the *FooC* archive reveals a special programme on Kennedy's assassination which replaces the regular program. It reveals a curious interpretation of the reaction to the events

“On returning to the hotel, we were horrified to hear the news of President Kennedy's assassination. But not the Americans in the hotel. They seemed unmoved, almost don't care. It was the same story at the Airport in St. Louis. Jazz music on the loudspeakers, men and women eating and drinking, laughing and joking. I was the only person with the other foreign correspondents to be listening to a transistor radio and the developing news of the tragedy...Now, there seem to be two points arising from this apparent indifference of so many Americans outside Washington: first, the United States is a country which traditionally reacts very slowly to events, and the shock of the President's assassination may well have numbed many who carried on their normal lives bewildered and apparently indifferent, while underneath the pain and doubt was at work” (FooC Script, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1963)

When he writes from the Baker Hotel in Dallas, just over a week after the assassination, his disorientation and the unreality of the event still resonates in his thoughts. Returning to the idea of the relay which I discussed in the first chapter, relays in journalistic-political assemblages take a variety of forms, but are never *singularly* human or non-human, always containing an interplay of the two: the MERS from Chapter 5 was constituted as much by the meetings of F.R.Maginnis, Charlton Higgs and others at the foreign office as it was the directional aerial system at Masirah and the geopolitical information war with revolutionary Arab countries and the Soviet Union. In this case, Parkin is a human component, a transistor or semi-conductor in a different relay system, that of the event, the mediated-traumatic, which, like Agamemnon's signal crossing space transmits world-historical information, altering the identity of individuals and technological media: the tape holding the broadcast undergoes a change in identity from the moment before the broadcast to the moment after. The collective act of enunciation and its effectuating variables are, again, constantly subject to change. Further to this, though, as the extracts from the *FooC* script indicate, a variety of pre-personal expressive capacities act on the correspondent, and by transitivity, the radio assemblage itself.

## 7.8 Conclusions

This chapter has drawn attention to another set of archival materials, materials that once again, illustrate the ambivalence of the radio assemblage in popular

geopolitics. The biography of the foreign news correspondent speaks to and builds on the concerns of the previous chapters directly. They exist as another point in the assemblage of foreign news which solidifies around the material infrastructures discussed in chapter 5 and the textual cartographies from chapter 6 and are constructed by multiple material and socio-cultural forces including gender, class, technology and organisations. Parkin's identity is bound up with but not reducible to the radio context in which he operates. It is also (in) formed by myriad political and socio-cultural atmospheres and contexts within which he moves and is moved. Returning to the theme of the previous chapter, and the edited collections of *FooC*, a similar aesthetic has grown up around the foreign correspondent, in the vein of the "celebrity autobiography" (e.g. Adie 2002) where the news becomes an event-frame, or back grounding to the life of the correspondent as they move through (historic) time, inverting the mantra of early BBC news. Parkin's archive can be seen as the opposite: the weight of the event-objects relationally connected to the letters "presses" upon the identity of Parkin.

Recent historical geographies have drawn on life history as one way of mapping the "circuitry of empire", a circuitry explicitly linked to Diana Coole's reading of new materialism as integral to a post-human understanding of the international. I argue here that this phrase can be thought of literally, rather than simply metaphorically. As I have presented in the first chapter, the circuitry of the BBC's "empire" is a complex, multi-layered assemblage, composing various individuals, materials, discourses and events. Similarly, just as the life-courses of imperial viceroys, colonial officials and other "civilising subjects" have proved fertile ground for the study of the historical geography of the imperial period during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, these kinds of lives do not disappear in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Rather, as we can see with Parkin, they are transformed into post-imperial subjects 'careerings'. Just as journalistic discourses of 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism informed some of the tropes of modern orientalism, so too is the twentieth century correspondent tied to the emerging realities of the proto-globalized world; highly mobile, utilising and bound up with modern instruments of communication and pressed upon to produce ever greater quantities of copy in ever diminishing timeframes with advanced (but often unreliable) technology. However, as Thomas (2004) has pointed out with regards to the wives of imperial viceroys, it is not simply the tropes and representations of the

colonial period which are maintained, the role played by the supporting (female) family networks illustrated by the letters demonstrate the force of gendered identity in the journalistic assemblage. Parkin's archive is a fortunate discovery, given the monumental world events occurring during the time of his letters home, events which are ever present between the lines, seeping in through the margins of the pages. Just as the imperial career, then, should indeed be seen as "individual history...mapped across different sites of empire. The theatres of empire constructed different possibilities, each provided as site for the articulation of different relations of power, different subject positions, different cultural identities" (Hall 2002, 20, cited in Lambert & Lester 2006, 16). Returning back to Latour's idea of the "exquisite cadaver" by which the apparently simple object, or "black box" rapidly expands to fill up the viewfinder of our theoretical frameworks with a vast series of relations and "meanwhiles" within which it is implicated, so too the archived text, the letter, the diary, the memo, the script also expand. Sometimes these expansions are related to the technological processes going on around them, enabling or disabling them. Other times they are due to the vast networks of intertextuality and reference in which texts exist. Others still are found in the landscape of events contained as absent presences within the text of the letters. Perhaps more importantly, for the theoretical framework proposed here, the importance of the gendered notions of subjectivity implicated in the journalistic identity of the BBC correspondent are revealed as vitally important to the subject-within the radio assemblage. Explicitly gendered notions of *who* is able to broadcast are clear from the BBC's policies at the time, and we also find in Parkin's letters the iteration of journalistic masculinities such as emotional inhibition in discussing violence or trauma for example.

Furthermore, as has been established with relation to travel narratives more generally, the letters often engage in the use of fictional means to interpret facts (Lisle 2006, 39), something which is, as I have shown here, also reversible; fiction bleeds into the lifeworld and lifepath in exactly the same way. The difference in the examples above, from more conventional accounts of travel writing, is that through a reading of the personal archive in conjunction with the conceptual map of assemblage we can attempt to observe and draw (always partially of course) the

micro-processes by which these things may come to inform and act upon each other, both symbolically but also as objects which *do something*.

This and the previous two chapters show some of the material and expressive components of the radio broadcast assemblage of the BBC during the 1960's as a way of demonstrating both the possibilities of this kind of thinking to popular geopolitical research and the networked approach to infrastructures, individuals and texts. In the next and final substantive chapter, I wish to broaden the question of radio to discuss how we might think of radio as the electromagnetic spectrum and its attendant materiality in relation to geopolitics and the geopolitical, through attention to how the spectrum, and particularly its nuclear implications, so central to the politics of the Cold War. have been thought and represented (geo)politically in various technical, artistic and literary examples. This departure from the previous chapters is intentional, seeking as it does to draw on strands of object oriented ontologies, particularly those concerned with complex-impossibly complex-objects and to think them outwith purely human scales and temporalities.





## Chapter 8

### Imagining the geographies of radio otherwise.

*“Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug into mother earth. The immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale—that is, in the spirit of technology” (Benjamin, 2009, 114)*

*“So, what are we to make of the invisible electromagnetic sleet that attends any human place, this pulsing cloud of signal that threatens to exhaust my store of metaphors and which it is already half a cliché to discuss? Does not any consideration of this belong to the city of stones?” (Hagar, H, Perello, J & Vicente, J 2011, 45)*

#### 8.0 Introduction

The final substantive chapter of this thesis looks to expand the concerns that have gone before into the representation of radio, and how we might think of the radio spectrum in relation to its wider political and cultural geographies. It recovers what has gone before by way of asking questions about what might come after. The unusual nature of the theoretical tools being utilised, in combination with the fundamental inaccessibility of radio to many “conventional” forms of writing necessitated an imaginative approach to reading the archive, reading its textuality as assemblage and stretching this to imagine radio’s multiple fields of material relations. This chapter stretches these approaches further, in order to read and write the geopolitics of radio wave assemblages as material phenomena.

All objects undergo changes in form across time. At a most basic metaphysical level, this is the fundamental relation of all things to time. These changes can involve decay, and be within scales accessible to human perception (a fire gradually converts from wood to ash or forgotten food at the back of the fridge moulds), or they can be processes so vastly distributed in time and space as to be inaccessible to immediate human perception, such as climate change or evolution (Morton 2010, 130-35). These changes are equally true for textual “objects” and their meanings, which may alter fundamentally in relation to time (hermeneutics may be regarded as one way in which this decay can be studied) as they are for “material” or “physical” objects and structures. For my purposes here, the objects of radio are observed in their decay, in a fossilisation in the written archive, whilst the broadcasts themselves (as experiential objects) are largely illustrated by their absence. What remains of the materiality of the radio waves and transmissions which circulated around the BBC during the mid-late 1960’s are the aerial schematics, minutes of meetings, relief maps; a few out-buildings on a desert island, historical vignettes, scripts and biographies brought to light in the previous chapters. The experimental mode of writing and analysis encouraged by the hybridised approach I seek to apply to these decaying objects has been intended to take up the challenge to attend once again to the “little things” of geopolitics, seemingly insignificant materials, prepositions and everyday objects (Thrift 1999). Investigating radio as a material-semiotic phenomenon, as opposed to one grounded solely in existing critiques of language or power has, it is hoped, also made a substantive contribution to the new political geography of objects in popular culture, however these objects are conceived (Meehan et al 2013).

As discussed above, with certain exceptions, research at the crossings of popular culture, media and political-cultural geography has focussed on technologies of *inscription* rather than technologies of *transmission*. This is to say that this presupposes a useful distinction between “telecommunications (telegraphy, telephony, wireless) rather than storage media (photography, phonography, cinema)” (Kahn 2013). Studies in the ontology of media, even in the context of the historical networks of radio, fossilised in the archive and discussed in first chapter, also largely repeat this focus on the former rather than the latter (see, e.g. Kittler, 1992, 1999). That popular geopolitics rarely taken cognisance of this distinction seems unusual,

given the centrality it would seem to have in relation to the objects of its research. The ways in which photography, cinema, cartoons and other inscriptions are extensively researched, often at the expense of or isolated from their modes of transmission, is testament to this. With regards to radio, this distinction is even less justifiable. To be sure, parts of this thesis have focused on the inscriptions made by radio programs, but in general has sought to expand our view of radio geopolitics beyond this, to its wider transmission ecologies.

As the introduction made clear, the radio technologies evolved at a rapid pace during the early twentieth century since Marconi's initial transmission and were further aided by parallel scientific developments in the understanding and instrumentalisation of the electromagnetic spectrum. Radio waves are one part of this much wider material but often imperceptible *hyperobjects*. Geopolitics, as I have outlined, is inextricably bound up with precisely these developments in the instrumentalisation of the spectrum, with the nuclear age following the detonation of the first atomic bombs and the harnessing of atomic power representing a profound shift in the way geopolitics became thought of: power politics no longer became a matter of large scale, occasional and survivable conflicts but now became a threat to the possibility of continued human existence as such.

As we have seen, even in more experimental research thinking about the geopolitics of information, technology and media, the electromagnetic spectrum *itself* is often forgotten, or treated simply as a vehicle for texts. This is, I think, to elide the ways in which it operates at both registers simultaneously: the materiality of the spectrum and its attendant infrastructures can, and do carry representations to (and designed for) mass audiences but *also* exist and work in a multiplicity of other registers and at different thresholds, within and between objects and bodies. Consequently, this chapter departs somewhat from the previous focus on the popular geopolitics of radio broadcast networks, infrastructures and texts, and addresses the broader question of the materiality of the radio spectrum in geopolitics and popular culture and is intended as both a substantive analysis and also a provocation in relation to the idea of the radio spectrum as a geopolitical object. It draws on various cultural examples to pose the question of what we consider radio to *be* in relation not only to the (geo) political, but to some of our ideas of "world(s)" *as such*. Where previous chapters have sought to show how, at a given time, seemingly vastly different sets of

objects, texts and individuals coalesced, in material-cultural assemblage, this chapter offers a reading of the substance or material of electromagnetism itself and makes an attempt to trace, through attention to popular cultural forms, the fields of geopolitical relations engendered by the radio spectrum. These other ways of imagining the leftovers, remains or other archives and traces of the invisible fields of radio previously discussed are read with particular reference to specific examples relating to conceptual art, literature and sound recording.

The following sections engage, through various examples, popular cultural sites of human-radio encounters and how these can be related to the object-oriented-assemblage conceptual schema worked through in the previous chapters, firstly focussing the way in which radio spectrum developments, structures and objects were central to the “darker” geopolitics of the Cold War period. This is illustrated through the clandestine militarization of the spectrum conducted in earnest during the Cold War: short wave numbers station broadcasts and radar. It concludes with reflections on how these fragments of the spectrum share the problematic archival relations of presence and absence with what has gone before, Moving on from this into the underlying nuclear politics of the era, the chapter then reflects on some of the radio (active) relations left-over in popular culture from the discovery and deployment of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Finally the chapter looks to further reading of ways in which conceptual art and artists have sought to create non-representational works to speak to the ephemerality and ubiquity of the radio spectrum. This is due to an essential ambiguity, but also how the difficulty of employing representational language to delineate the much larger geopolitical-geophilosophical object of electromagnetism *as such*, whether this is in the fields of art, science or politics.

These sections are also intended as animations of the concepts, ideas and objects I have sought to work with over the course of this thesis; an excursion into the possibilities of thinking through and writing about the non-visible “thingness” of radio technologies and radio waves, and how they have come to create their own spaces, spaces they still inhabit even through the fossilized remains of infrastructures or the scripted histories of broadcast journalism found in radio’s voluminous, if imperfect written archive. The reason for the divergent focus of this chapter lies in the recognition that thinking about the geographies of radio expands into a greater

relational field than that discussed thus far, and the geoscientific, geo-philosophical implications of thinking assemblages.

### **8.1 Popular Geopolitics, Radio conspiracies and Cold War hauntologies**

As another geopolitical instrumentalisation of the radio spectrum, Radar is predicated on a particular notion of presence and absence. It is able to reveal that which enters its range and, more importantly, that which is within its range which seeks to conceal itself from it. These need not be “hard” or molar military objects (like ships, aircraft or submarines) but also molecular objects like communications and signals. I employ the terms molar and molecular in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari, who write of telegraph code that “[i]nstead of a rigid line composed of well-determined segments, telegraphy now forms a supple flow marked by *quanta* that are like so many little segmentations-in-progress grasped at the moment of their birth, as on a moonbeam, or on an intensive scale” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 216).

The importance of radar in military-strategic calculus in second half of the twentieth century, and particularly the Cold War cannot be over-stated, providing as it did, a central plank of the nuclear balance. Radar works through the “bouncing” of electromagnetic waves off objects in their path and back to the transmission station, locating objects at a distance. Networks of radar stations became vital to the intelligence signalling of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) during the Cold War period, with both Russia and the United States dedicating vast budgets to the building of Radar “walls” (Farish 2010) in order to detect incoming ballistic missiles. This is to say that MAD rested not only on a pure arithmetic based on estimated payload capacity and delivery capabilities calculated by US and Soviet defence planners, but also on a system of command and control, at the forefront of which was the detection system of early-warning radar systems. As one security document puts it

“The primary mission of an early warning system is to detect a missile attack before the missiles reach their targets. A timely detection of an incoming strike would make it possible to determine the scale of an attack and its origin, estimate potential damage, and choose an appropriate response. An early warning system is absolutely necessary for implementation of a launch-on-warning posture, which assumes that a retaliatory strike would be launched before attacking missiles reach their targets” (Podvig 2002, 22)

The Early Warning System then, does not deflect, deter or postpone the cataclysm, instead only enabling a time window to reflect it back. The radar “wall” developed by the USA across the Alaskan/Canadian border with Russia as a defence against a surprise attack launched from the USSR’s eastern peripheries is discussed by Farish (2010) as vital to the military geography of the Cold War, although comparatively little has been said about the concomitant radar installations of the Soviet/Warsaw Pact EWS in the Baltic states. Here, Deleuze and Guattari’s logic of the war machine is re-constituted: the molecular (radar) of the war machine is ossified into the (molar) structure of the wall, the symbolic structure of pre-modern and post-modern international relations. Although the “wall” cannot prevent the spectacular de-territorialization of the ballistic nuclear missile, it serves a vital re-territorialization function in the epistemic logic of deterrence.

In 1955 the Soviet Union began construction of the Skrunda “hen house” radar station near the town of Skrunda in Western Latvia. These kinds of radar were amongst the largest structures built in Europe during the Cold War. The transmitter power of the station ran between 1.8 to 3MW and combined two wing-type antenna, measuring 250mx17m. Skrunda station was designed to be the largest of a network of early warning stations which would be able to detect the presence and trajectories of any incoming Intercontinental Ballistic Missile attack. In 2008, a collective of artists and scientists based in Riga, under the name RIXC produced a collaborative project on the spectral ecology of the Skrunda station, taking into account the various cultural, scientific and geopolitical afterlives of the station and comprising a collation of the scientific research on electromagnetic pollution in general and around Skrunda in particular, along with a series of interviews with researchers into the field of bioelectromagnetics. Skrunda station thus belongs to the architectural hauntology of the Cold War, or war in general. The spectral history of communication and detection, and investigates the monstrous topographies of Cold War radar constructions through video interviews with local residents and health professionals near the remains of the station in Western Latvia, poses unsettling questions about the long-term implications for human bodies exposed to experimental radio technologies. *Skrunda Signal*, then, demonstrates how the fragmented legacy of the Cold War still reverberates in the invisible space of the airwaves; echoes of an analogue conflict still haunting a rapidly digitizing world. The art theorist Martin

Howse compares systems such as Skruna to the field of a “steganographic conspiracy” with

“The antenna as curse, as sole signifier for an invisible war, radiating a certain warmth aside from its information-carrying possibilities, a measurement tied to watts and energy (how many potential spies can be reached with so much power from the transmitter); a heat which can be directed by the antenna, for use as a weapon (an Active Denial System). The antenna as plague bubo, as symptom; cancer sites as cross-correlated with pulsed microwave antenna fixtures” (Howse 2011, 80)

This illustrates the concerns of radiation which I will move on to later chapter in relation to nuclear weapons and shows, once again, that the Cold War radio-broadcast ecology which has been the focus of this thesis also contained within it a far darker, malignant set of relations and geographies.



*Fig.37 HAARP Station, Gakona Alaska (Creative Commons)*

Sheltered beneath the Wrangell St-Elias National Park & Preserve in Alaska, a massive field of antenna array is carved out of the landscape (*Fig.42*). The project, known as the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), began in 1993 under the supervision of the United States office of Naval Research and is designed to study the ionosphere. Given its scale and the geophysical implications of its research, HAARP is to the electromagnetic spectrum, both scientifically and politically, what the Large Hadron Collider is to particle physics; an immense, multi-organisational collaboration between science, academia and the military. As such it

has become fertile ground for conspiracy theories, which have attributed a laundry-list of evils to its existence and research including (but not limited to) weather manipulation and mind control. Laura Jones (2012) gives one of the few accounts of the ways in which conspiracy theories about secret networks of power come to form a “commonplace geopolitics” to their adherents. Conspiratorial narratives around projects like HAARP, Skruna or other large-scale geophysical-military research point to a strongly materialist dimension to these kinds of conspiracy narratives which speak to variations on themes of atmosterrorism and the perturbation of the air on a geopolitical scale (Sloterdijk 2009). This returns again to the themes discussed in the earlier chapters: ionospheric research was crucial to the military establishments of the early twentieth century, as it was at the forefront of discovering what was “possible” in terms of transmitting information or communications. HAARP (and other contemporary projects like it) are engaged in testing the limits of what is possible in terms of opening up regions of the earth to standing-reserve, either to communication potential or extraction. Thus Heidegger’s theory on technology and enframing is once again illustrated, and the technological mode of being directs world-closure through these kinds of scientific explorations. However, the project is never “complete”, and the enclosure is never total (or so it seems).

Another example of the conspiracy and paranoia engendered by Cold War radio waves is to be found in the existence of shortwave “numbers stations”, broadcasting strings of seemingly random, meaningless numbers read aloud at designated times, on specific frequencies. The stations were allegedly (for everything related to their existence still retains a shroud of secrecy) conceived as a one-way communication method utilised by intelligence agencies to contact agents in foreign countries, where the string of numbers or other encryption was broadcast within the High Frequency (HF) band, receivable by standard shortwave radio equipment. The broadcasts sometimes contain snippets of music, background static and feedback, and voices of both genders in a variety of languages. They broadcast for minutes at a time, on frequent, identifiable patterns, but beyond these basic facts, little is known officially about the structure, purpose or networks these transmissions were intended to or for, aside from the obvious benefits they demonstrate for espionage. What is clear, however, is that not only do many remain “on air”, long after the end of the Cold War, but that new stations and broadcasts have emerged since 1990.

The cataloguing and discussion into numbers stations remains firmly in the realm of the “enthusiast”, the outer reaches of internet message boards and discussion forums. The stations do not respond to standardised questions regarding the nature and source of their transmissions, which can usually be made by any amateur/enthusiast. Culturally they have been found permeating into the mainstream only as a plot device (particularly popular geopolitical texts) on occasion, providing a plot device for video games, film or television programs. Little academic writing exists on numbers stations, and only when Akin Fernandez, a radio enthusiast, compiled a comprehensive series of recordings of numbers station transmissions along with an accompanying text, did the phenomenon begin to leave the obscure, shadowy regions of broadcast geopolitics they had previously inhabited.

As Fernandez points out, the cryptographic strength of the numbers station is that it was and remains impervious to code-breaking. Using “one time pad” keycodes, known only to the broadcaster and receiver, the ciphertext cannot be decrypted without access to the key, even to “heavy lifting” code-breaking such as brute-force searches. Consequently, the transmission itself can be “visible” without the need to protect against Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) interception. Shortwave broadcasts, with their global accessibility are therefore made to work *for* the transmitters, enabling the recipient to receive instructions or messages anywhere and, more importantly, inconspicuously. The regularity and repetitious nature of these broadcasts mean that they have receded into the background of radio listening ecologies, becoming a kind of static. As Fernandez suggests

“They take them as just another type of noise that is to be filtered out and ignored. The unchallenged existence of Numbers Stations is a symptom of the somnambulistic state that the world’s educated populations live in. Anything can be done to this population, and no one will notice or react in any way. If German phonetic numbers were transmitted by the BBC World Service immediately after the news, not an eyebrow would be raised, nor a question asked. Attitudes to the Numbers Station situation are similar to the “there is no such thing as the Mafia” mindset that was paraded around in the 1950’s. Ostrich Posturing.” (Fernandez, 2004, 10)

Fernandez also points out that to listen to Numbers Station transmissions is, in the UK, an offence under the Wireless Telegraphy Act, which states

“A person commits an offence if, otherwise than under the authority of a designated person—

(a) he uses wireless telegraphy apparatus with intent to obtain information as to the contents, sender or addressee of a message (whether sent by means of wireless telegraphy or not) of which neither he nor a person on whose behalf he is acting is an intended recipient, or

(b) he discloses information as to the contents, sender or addressee of such a message.”(TSO 2006)

UK broadcast numbers stations, such as the “Lincolnshire poacher” (actually triangulated to a civil-military broadcast station on Cyprus, also traceable to the Middle Eastern Relay Service) would fall under this description: the act of listening to a broadcast intended to communicate to clandestine services or agents being thus forbidden. This is another illustration of the visible/invisible sensible/non-sensible dynamics of broadcasting; numbers stations are “public”, in the sense of being aurally “visible”, but most definitely not intended to be *heard to* by the public. Such a dynamic encourages, if not enforces a selective deafness, the legal-cultural epitome of state power’s discursive mantra: “there’s nothing to see here”. The numbers station can thus be seen in the context of a broadcast geopolitics similar to that discussed in previous chapters, albeit along the lines of the clandestine kind; clandestine, but in plain sight, as the broadcasts are unencrypted and can be heard by anyone in possession of a standard, short wave radio receiver, illustrating that “something is quite obviously being hidden yet there is no access to that transcendental message, that indeed there is only the *appearance* of hiding”(Howse 2011, 76).

The stations have remained, perhaps curiously, impervious to academic research and the task of cataloguing, analysis and explanation has been conducted almost entirely by radio amateurs and enthusiasts. This is interesting in the respect that the figure of the amateur radio operator is often spoken of in the history of the medium as, an irritant, frustrating attempts by states to divide up and regulate the airwaves and provide “good air”, as Peter Eckersley put it. Marconi himself was, of course, the original amateur enthusiast, albeit a particularly well-funded and expansive one. Closer to the standard cultural image of the enthusiast though is again to be found in Serge, in Tom McCarthy’s novel *C*. Serge’s childhood fascination with experimental wireless is articulated in McCarthy’s text that comes as close to an object oriented ontology of radio waves as can be found in contemporary fiction:

“The static’s like the sound of thinking. Not of any single person thinking, or even a group thinking, collectively, it’s bigger than that, wider—and more direct. It’s like the sound of thought itself, its hum and rush. Each night, when Serge drops in on it, it recoils with a wail, then rolls back in crackling waves that carry him away, all rudderless, until his finger, nudging at the dial, can get some traction on it all, some sort of leeway. The first stretches are angry, plaintive, sad—and always mute...The transmitter itself is made of standard brass, a four-inch tapper arm keeping Serge’s finger a safe distance from the spark gap. The spark gap flashes blue each time he taps; it makes a spitting noise, so loud he’s had to build a silence box around the desk to isolate his little RX station from the sleeping household—or, as it becomes more obvious to him with every session, to maintain the little household’s fantasy of isolation from the vast sea of transmission roaring all around it” (McCarthy 2011, 64)

This description of the early “ham” radio enthusiast is significant in that Serge appears as *part of* the technological space of transmission, rather than standing outside it. His status as a thinking, conscious subject in no way standing over and above that within which he is imbricated. To be sure, the “fantasy of isolation from the vast sea of transmission”, is made explicit by Morton, when he discusses the painting as object (as opposed to representation). The geopolitics of transmission is, I would argue, ideal for “testing” the suppositions of OOO/Assemblage/ANT as it demonstrates a clear example of a space where the human and technological, the “natural” and the “social” are inextricable and irreducible to one another.

### **8.1 Geographies of Electromagnetism: Aerials, Radar, Ionospheric Research**

The centrality of radio transmission to the geopolitics of information makes disruption of the capacity of a world-system of transmission catastrophic in its own right. Recent studies into new materialism, particularly in the vitalist tradition of Spinoza and Deleuze have placed electricity as one of the “conative bodies in (an) assemblage” (Bennett 2010; 26). This goes to the heart of the distinction between readiness-to-hand, where objects (or in this case machines) retreat into a background of equipment, and presence-at-hand when they emerge (as broken or non-functioning).

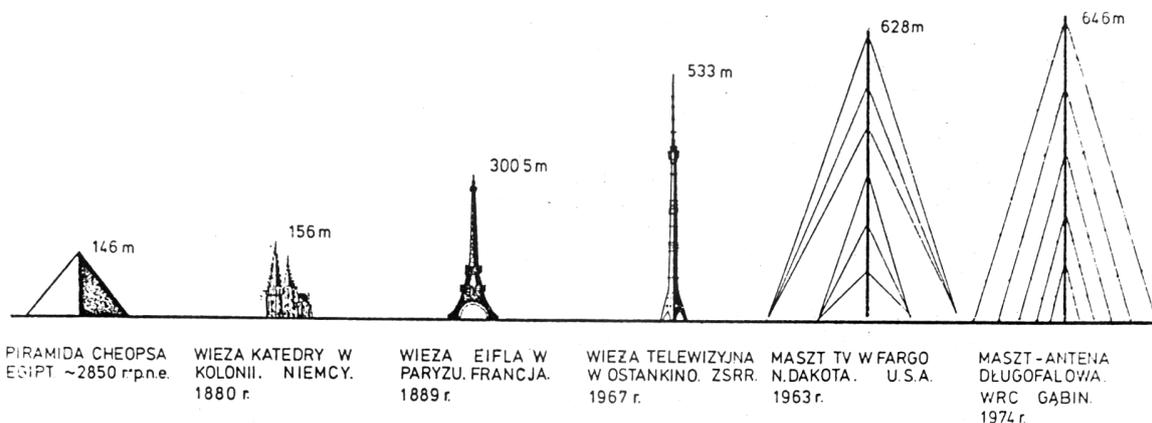
“In a system like the North American grid, electrical current and voltage are constantly oscillating like a pair of waves. When the two waves are in phase with each other, one has so-called active power, or the type of power used most heavily by lamps, blow-dryers, and other appliances. But some devices (such as the electric motors in refrigerators and air conditioners) rely also on so-called reactive power, where the waves are not in synch. Reactive power, though it lends no help in

physically rotating a motor, is vital to the active power that accompanies it, for reactive power maintains the voltage (electricity pressure) needed to sustain the electromagnetic field required by the system as a whole. If too many devices demand re-active power, then a deficit is created. One of the causes of the blackout was a deficit of reactive power.”(Ibid)

As I have argued throughout, Bennett’s argument here, and others like it, is that the relational materialism she argues for must take waves, electrons and hair dryers as actants on a par with the human social and governmental institutions in assemblage with them. Whilst I do not dispute the underlying logic of Bennett’s ontology, there seems to be a missing element to the story. Electrical and electromagnetic assemblages involve an even greater range of *externalities* than those concentrated on the socio-material surface of the earth. A vast assemblage of radioactive elements and geological processes proceed indifferent to the narrow range of conditions sustaining the geo (politics) of communication and information. To put this into context, it is useful to make a distinction in the theoretical literature between the vitalism of Bennett, William Connolly, (and possibly DeLanda) which, whilst embracing non-human ontologies still tends towards a broadly “human” idiolect. This is to say that the vitalism argued for by these writers contains *living, vibrant* (albeit de-centred) human bodies, subjects and collectives. This “bright” vitalism should be contrasted with more recent interventions forming what is best thought of as “dark” vitalism such as those argued for by Reza Negerastani (2008) and Ben Woodard (2013). In these versions of vitalism, Woodard and Negarestani employ the speculative fictions of “planet demolition”, “digging/worming” and “ungrounding” as metaphors on which to base a turbulent, violent and ultimately hopeless – anthropically hopeless – geophilosophy. This recognises the role played by the cosmic sea of electromagnetism, ultraviolet radiation and the metaphysical implications of cosmic background radiation for the understanding of the history of the universe. In Chapter 5, I addressed how the radio relay and the monitoring receiver as two networked structures were shown to be composed of multiple, distributed relations in time and space. The BBC and DWS archives have showed that radio waves were not the only fields found to be emanating within and around these objects, and that political and bureaucratic exigencies, global political dynamics and anti-colonial insurgences were implicated alongside costs, departmental competition and cultural diplomacy in the production of radio’s networked ontology. Here I want to take another approach to the objects of radio

and how these might be implicated in a different set of cultural and political relations that are connected to, yet distinct from those previously discussed.

The conspicuous traces left by decayed, collapsed or otherwise abandoned radio towers are a necessary condition of their function. The images of the dilapidated (yet still present) buildings on Masirah are evidence of the material afterlives of colonial installations dismantled and abandoned. Relatively speaking, though, the MERS at Masirah was a “small” installation. Radio towers were, after all, the first kind of “mega-structure” for which verticality in-and-of-itself was imperative. Many of the great bridges, canals and other engineering masterpieces of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were “big” because they *could* be, rather than “high” because they *needed* to be. It is technically (and therefore aesthetically) impossible to build an “understated” radio mast (in the sense of limiting its height whilst maintaining its effectiveness). The radio mast (and, in a way, the radio telescope) was to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century what the medieval cathedral was to the religious orders of the 15<sup>th</sup>: an attempt, using the architectural conventions and materials of the day to build *upwards* in service of divinity (Judaeo-Christian-theistic or secular-enlightenment-scientific).



*Fig.39 Evolution of the world's tallest structures to 1974 (Licenced under creative commons)*

Radio masts, though, are unlike most cathedrals (but like many bridges), in their propensity for collapse. In 1991, during a maintenance procedure to exchange the guy-wires tethering the structure to the earth, several cables of the Warsaw Radio

Mast suddenly snapped, shearing the main body of the mast in two. It remains the second-highest structure ever built.



*Fig. 40 Remains of Warsaw radio mast, (Present-at-hand) (Creative Commons)*

A rectangular area covering 13,000 square miles around the National Radio Astronomy Observatory at Green Bank, West Virginia, USA is designated by federal law as the “National Radio Quiet Zone”. Within this area, the construction of high-powered transmitters and receivers is prohibited, existing broadcast antenna are required to operate at low power and use directional antenna, and only emergency frequencies, one AM and a handful of FM frequencies are operative. Wireless, Bluetooth and mobile phone signals are non-existent at all but the very peripheries of the zone. The Green Bank radio telescope is the world’s largest fully steerable radio telescope and the restriction of electromagnetic noise pollution in the zone allows the scientists working with the telescope to measure frequencies in the 1,400 to 1,427Mhz range. This idea was prefigured in 1924, when “[o]n the occasion of the close proximity of Mars to Earth, a national radio silence day was proclaimed, with cooperation from military communications and corporate broadcasters, just in case any intelligent life form might be transmitting”(Kahn 2013, 23).

## 8.2 The threat of militarised human-wave relations: The Radio spectrum in the Nuclear Age

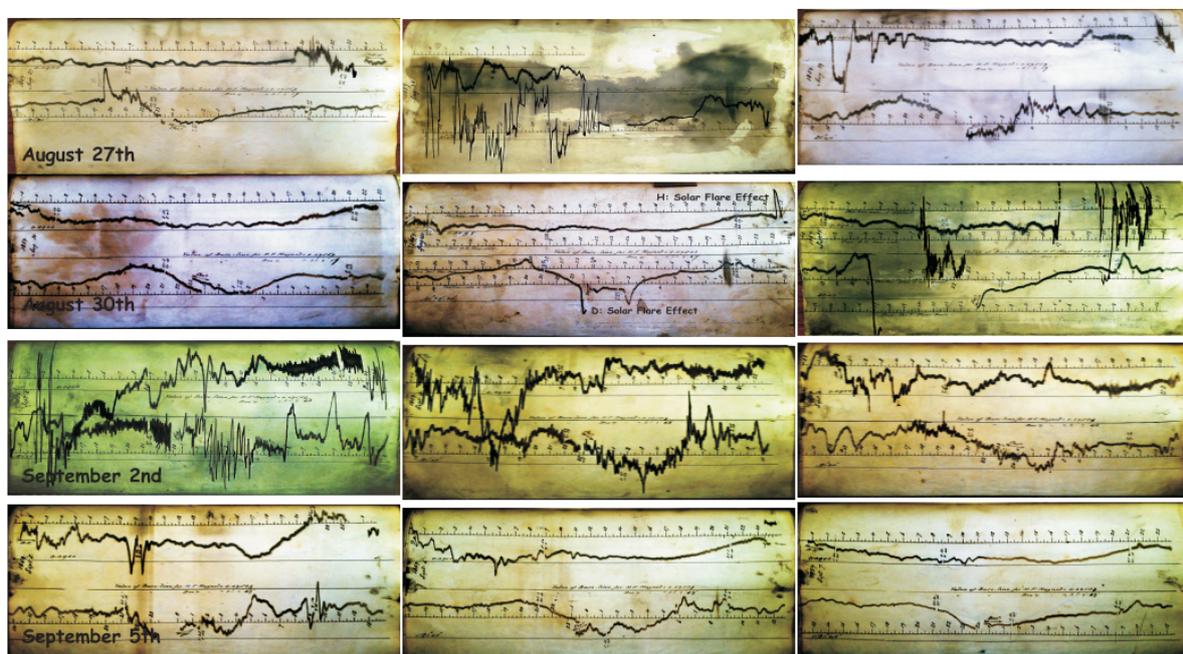
It is often forgotten that the radio spectrum was *heard* before it was *invented*. This is to say that the natural patterns of interference and static of electromagnetic “whistlers” and other upper-atmospheric phenomena were observed by Alexander Graham Bell’s assistant, Watson, during the testing of the first telephones. In Chapter 5 I discussed how, in the early days of radio, Marconi’s discovery of the way in which of shortwaves, previously thought unsuitable for long-distance communication, were able to propagate through ionospheric reflection or ‘skipping’, changed the face of radio broadcasting, particularly in relation to how global political space was thought, enabling broadcasting to traverse much greater distances than had previously been the case. As historians of science, particularly physics, have found, radio research proceeded hand in hand with the shifting imperatives of national security and imperial governance in the early decades of the twentieth century (Anduaga 2009, 10). During the First World War, and inter-war period, the development of signals intelligence branches which used direction-finding (D/F) antenna to locate the *source* of transmissions, rather than to simply decode their content, was pioneered by Thomas L. Eckersley, the elder brother of the BBC Engineer Peter Eckersley. It was this research that contributed to the understanding of precisely how the ionosphere worked, particularly in relation to electromagnetic “whistlers” which were generated by lightening, and laid the ground for wireless communication, as we know it today. By the end of the Second World War, the geopolitical importance of having both advanced radio technologies and networks *and* the specialists to operate and maintain them, both in military and civilian contexts was likewise established.

The sound of “natural” radio waves is often under-theorised in studies of media. As one critic has put it, “when it comes to communications, nature is (seen as) more of a sidekick, even though it has always been the biggest broadcaster, bigger than all corporations, governments, militaries and other purveyors of anthropic signals combined” (Kahn 2013, 2). This is not simply a chronological point (Watson “heard” the natural radio waves of the spectrum as telephonic interference well before

Marconi “invented” radio broadcasting), but also a relational one: the electromagnetic spectrum exists naturally at a variety of thresholds prior to the creation of human transduction through technical prosthesis to either propagate or receive/decode transmissions. Returning once more to Heidegger, the spectrum is thus part of a “nature” or “world” which is transformed into *bestand* (standing reserve) by human technological modes of revealing, whereby the “unrestrained exploitation of the earth as a source of raw materials [and] the straight-out utilization of human resources”(Foltz 1995, 102) becomes the primary metaphysical relation of humans to the earth. This way of thinking, however, does not escape the distinction between the “exploding”, presence-at-hand of Harman’s reading of the broken tool, whereby the ‘disappearance’ (i.e. receding from presence-at-hand) of tools, whether these are hammers or advanced radar systems, into a background of functioning equipment continues only as long as this perfect functional relationship does.

Once interference, static or other breakdowns occur the, pervasiveness of the spectrum demonstrates its most potent geopolitical effects. The “sea” of electromagnetism in which we all find ourselves, already-within, is constantly prone to the occasional, barely predictable currents, tides and tsunamis of solar storms, coronal mass ejections, all of which can have a potentially devastating effect on the earth; geopolitics as geophilosophy. The centrality of radio transmission to the geopolitics of information means that even a small scale disruption of this order could be regarded as catastrophic in its own right. Extreme geomagnetic solar storms and coronal mass ejections, where massive bursts of solar wind and electromagnetic radiation are exploded from the sun such as those observed during the Carrington event 1859 (*fig. 39*), led to widespread failure of the telegraph systems across Europe and North America. Such events today would have the capacity to severely disrupt electricity and communications networks upon which technological human societies have become dependent. Minor level events of this kind have occurred in Quebec in 1989 and worldwide in 2003 and their devastating potential for such societies has meant that they have become subsumed under political discourses of securitization, threat and resilience (Lloyds, 2003). The emergence into presence of immense, potentially catastrophic objects such as solar winds which also raises the spectre of human finitude, given that “the solar catastrophe which both precedes and follows, initiates and terminates the possibility of philosophizable

death” (Brassier 2003, 421). The sun is the necessary condition for the existence of life, and yet as a volatile, destructive nuclear reaction, destined to expand and destroy the earth along a relatively fixed timeline contains within it the extinction of human thought. The electromagnetic spectrum, it should be clear from this, is far from as simple a question of instrumentalisation for human purposes as it has often been portrayed. Here, also, we can begin to see how radio relations, when thought outside a narrowly human set of broadcast-audience dynamics, might present us with a far greater set of material issues, questions and problems.



Declination, or compass direction, ( $D$ ) is the lower trace on each image and the horizontal force ( $H$ ) is the upper trace. Universal Time is the time recorded here (astronomical) plus 12 hours and measured  $D$  precedes  $H$  by approximately 12 hours. For reference the marked 'solar flare effect', beginning at 23:15 recorded time on August 31st, is at 11:15 Universal Time on September 1st. It has been measured as 110 nT in  $H$  and 0.283 degrees in  $D$ .

*Fig.38 The Carrington Event, of August 27<sup>th</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1859, Recorded at Greenwich Observatory, London (British Geological Survey*  
<http://www.geomag.bgs.ac.uk/documents/CarringtonforWWW.pdf>

The (geo) political threat of malign patterns or frequencies of waves is, though, not limited to those exigencies witnessed in the solar catastrophe's effects on the upper atmosphere, or interactions between material objects but can also be seen in the "witnessing" of electromagnetic radiation at a variety of embodied registers; "the

warmth on the skin of infrared, the sunburn of ultraviolet.”(Kahn 2013,13). Perhaps the most potent set of radio-relations conceived in this way, though, can be witnessed in the aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and the birth of the nuclear age. The ramifications of humanity’s attempts to weaponise atomic power in this way are illustrated starkly:

“The detonation of an atomic bomb is said to result in rays that cover the entire length of the spectrum. The intensity of the thermal radiation was so great in Nagasaki that there were flash burns on such things as wood, oranges, tile and people [sic]. Such thin things as leaves, blades of grass, or clothing acted as filters and offered protection to their shadows. Ionizing radiation, the agent which makes the atomic bomb unique among all other weapons, not only contributed in Japan a biological experiment of unprecedented scope”(De Coursey, 1984, cited in Roff 1995, 34)

The term given in Japanese to those survivors (and their descendants) of the atomic bombings Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War is *hibakusha* which, literally translated, means “those subjected to the bomb and/or radiation”. The status of *hibakusha* did not come without its own set of legal, political and social struggles. The granting of a legal *hibakusha* certificate was predicated on an explicitly geographical relation: legally defined survivors were categorised as those who were within 2km of the hypocentre of the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, within two weeks of the attacks; those who were exposed to fallout and their unborn children (Lindee 2008, 5). Recent estimates count 251,834 currently registered *hibakusha* in Japan, with 2,242 of these being classified as having illnesses linked to radiation poisoning (‘Relief for A-bomb victims’, *Japan Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007). This ambiguous typology is testament to the politics of gamma rays, a specific mode of what Peter Sloterdijk (2009) has referred to as “atmosterrorism”: a shift in directionality of military technologies in the early twentieth century away from targeting the bodies of the enemy and towards targeting the environmental conditions sustaining their existence. Geographers such as Peter Adey (2013a; 2013b) and Stuart Elden (2013) have taken on Sloterdijk’s critique and turned it to a political ecological reading of the air and, more specifically the aerial, as a site of geographical production, disciplining, contestation and power (a critique with which I have engaged in earlier chapters). Some of this work is focussed on the visual, or optical, alongside a growing recognition that the governance of the air is also a question of respiration and olfaction as supplementary, yet interconnected sensoria.

The question that remains for me, though, is that the geography of radio waves and electromagnetism I am proposing encompasses a vast quantity of sub-sensory, sub-perceptual (that is to *human* perception) objects and processes which emerge from time to time into the realm of the *immediately* sensible and yet largely remain outside this, whilst nevertheless interacting *with, between, and within* bodies and other objects. This speaks also to cultural geography's "embodied turn" (e.g. Nash 2000), although very much in relation to the external forces which can act on a body, of which radio waves are one, but clearly not the only examples.

Clearly, the geopolitical value of the atomic bomb was not only as a destructive but also performative weapon, and whilst those involved in the development of the Bomb in Los Alamos were aware that radiation would be released, it was explicitly assumed that "any person with radiation damage would have been killed with a brick first" (cited in Lindee, *Ibid*, 12). However, as the post-war scientific consensus began to shift, in part due to the work of official medical organisations such as the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC), to the reality of radioactive fallout, contamination, increases in birth defects and long-term mortality became not only accepted but also factored into the strategic calculations of Cold War defence establishment planners preparing for the possibility of nuclear war. Thus, the *hibakusha* became constituted as an identity, whereby the physical and temporal proximity to the radiation released by the bomb became prioritized "over his or her numerous other social relationships and positions." (Yoneyama 1999, 85). Seen in this way then, survivors of atomic weapons are considered through their proximity to one set of thermonuclear relations (in the immediacy of the explosion) and a second set (in the radioactive fallout which followed) but, crucially, cannot be reduced through either. To further complicate this, the *hibakusha* often became socially and culturally isolated within Japanese society at large, illustrating social-symbolic distancing produced by the afterlives of radio relations. Just as we saw with the Masirah relay station, which highlighted the focus of popular geopolitical organisations to "capture" as many listening bodies as possible through effective infrastructure and coverage, and establish reliable surveillance as to the audibility of these broadcasts, the radio relations of nuclear weapons are bound up with a similar dynamics of distance and proximity between and within networks of complex objects.

Furthermore, as OOO theorists such as Harman and Levi Bryant have also pointed out,

“Machines harbour hidden and volcanic powers waiting to be unleashed. They can undergo surprising local manifestations when placed in new topological fields, but can also become in entirely different ways, developing or not developing powers that they would not otherwise have had”(Bryant 2015, 151)

Which in this case is demonstrated by the volcanic power of gamma radiation, unleashed not in the instant of the nuclear explosion, but in the relating of bodies to the radioactive fallout which occurred after this event: the radiation itself has power to cause catastrophic replication of cells but, absent bodies with such cellular structures, this capacity it remains dormant. As Bryant further states, with explicit relation to radio “Right now all sorts of radio waves are passing through me, yet I do not share a direct relation to them because they are unable to affect me”(Ibid, 146). The direct relation being a virtual capacity (space of possibility) which is opened up by the particular wave length of the electromagnetic spectrum propagating radiation.

### **8.3 Nuclear Radiation and Object Oriented Philosophy: The Radio Spectrum as Hyperobject**

Relating this deadly afterlife of radio waves to OOO provides a clear example of what Harman refers to as “vicarious causation”, where the contact between two objects is only mediated by one set of relevant relations, with other possible sets of relations withdrawing. Complex objects such as the atomic bomb are given special attention in the theoretical frames that have informed this thesis. Timothy Morton coins the term *Hyperobject* to account for massive entities such as nuclear radiation (and consequently the atomic bomb); climate change and evolution. This illustrates the impossibility of the subject-object correlate being able to persist undisturbed in what Morton calls “the time of hyperobjects” and, in many ways, shares family resemblances with Latour’s illustration of networks.

“Each witness gives a unique account of the bomb. No single witness experiences the entire bomb. No witness was too close to the bomb: otherwise they would have been evaporated, or quickly incinerated, or blown to pieces. There is a cores of human silence around which the witnesses give their testimony...Each story is told in a narrative present that is necessarily different form the moment at which the bomb

hit. The constraints of human physicality and memory displace the bomb. It becomes distant and close at the same time and for the same reasons. Possibly the most uncanny aspect of the bomb is the energy flash that the witnesses experienced as a silent, sudden bathing of everything in light so intense that they couldn't quite see."(Morton 2013a, 73)

This description is telling, as it echoes certain holocaust literatures which explore the paradoxical status of bearing witness to these events. These texts often point to the fact that, despite the necessity of testimony, there exists the aporia of "true" witness positions, even held by survivors to the catastrophe, given that dead as the only "true" witnesses (Levi 1989; Agamben 1999). The difference being in the case of the hyperobject of electromagnetic radiation, the witness to the bomb would have been incinerated, but only if we regard witnessing as conceived in the narrow field of visual identification. The status of the *Hibakusha* as witnesses emerges from their proximity to a set of radio (active) relations acting to produce distributed impressions upon their tissue and cells, creating another archive of radio. As Morton puts it, "[I]ike God taking a photograph, the nonhuman sees us, in the white light of its fireball, hotter than the sun...how much more is this the case with an object that leaves its alpha, beta, and gamma particle traces in your flesh, traces that alter your DNA for decades"(Morton Ibid, 75). The kind of perturbations which characterise the wider reading of radio relations produced by atomic bombs are destructive, cataclysmic, causing the air itself to become ionized in the moments after a nuclear detonation, which itself interferes with the capacity of the ionosphere to conduct radio transmissions and telegraphic machinery, in much the same way as the turbulent solar winds mentioned previously. We need not look far to find object oriented texts lurking below the surface of geopolitical history. In 1950, the US department of Defence and the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, under the direction of the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory produced a handbook entitled *The Effects of Atomic Weapons* (henceforth *Effects*). The title itself would appear to be a misnomer; the US and indeed the world had learned precisely what the effects of atomic weapons were five years previously. However, the introduction offers a rationalisation:

"The need for such a book, and the difficulties encountered in its preparation, arise from a common origin: the tremendous energy release resulting from an atomic bomb explosion. The need is for a book that can promote intelligent

understanding of the effects of this enormous energy release when used as a weapon in war. The difficulties stem from the fact that energy is released on a scale never before used by man, so that previous experience with high explosives provides an inadequate basis for scientific prediction of results. In addition, atomic explosion phenomena are so complex as to make precise quantitative evaluation of their results almost impossible”(Glasstone et al, 1950; vii)

*Effects* is, therefore, an ontograph of the nuclear age. Its paratext demonstrates this: “Chapter I – Principles of an atomic explosion, Chapter II – Description of an atomic explosion, Chapter III – Shock from Air burst, Chapter IV – Shock from underwater and underground burst, Chapter V – Physical damage, Chapter VI – Thermal Radiation and incendiary effects, etc...”(Ibid; v). As a text it engages in both the *undermining* and *overmining* metaphysical practices that Harman (2006) identifies as symptomatic of all philosophies, and which OOO seeks to circumvent. Firstly, *undermining* in its lengthy discussions of the physics of nuclear reactions/nuclear fissions, energy release, particles, ionization, thermal radiation effects and blast wave topographies; *Overmining*, which is less obvious, through the use of referential images such as the mushroom cloud, damage effect photographs and descriptions of the incendiary effects on human beings, which serve to demonstrate the power granted to the US by the harnessing of this technology. The text was, after all, published in 1950, shortly after the Soviet Union had conducted its first successful nuclear test in August 1949. It is inconceivable that the report was intended *only* for scientific or scholarly audiences within the US and allied countries. One interesting point remains, however: namely that despite the comprehensive account offered in *Effects*, there does indeed seem to be a “molten core” which withdraws from view. Without wanting to take things too literally, this is alluded to in the opening pages of the preamble: “Of necessity, classified information vital to national security has been omitted” (Glasstone et al, 1950; vii). Referring back again to Harman’s contestation that what *ontologically* becomes any object is the effects that its presencing of qualities has on other objects. As he puts it

“Equipment is not effective “because people use it”; on the contrary, it can only be used because it is *capable of an effect*, of inflicting some kind of blow on reality. In short, the tool isn’t “used”—it *is*...The tool is a real function effect, an invisible sun radiating its energies into the world before ever coming into view”(Harman, 2002; 20)

In the case of the atomic bomb, Uranium 238 has an effect on the world by coming into view in 1945, presenting certain of its hidden qualities (at least hidden until the advent of nuclear fission), although crucially always *mediated* by another object or objects: high-speed neutrons; Japanese militarism, the New Mexico skyline or Robert Oppenheimer's waste paper basket. This ontograph is though, crucially, *irreducible* either temporally or spatially and is instead, implicated in the same "clamour of being" with which OOO identifies itself.

"One feature of the roentgen should always be kept in mind: it provides a measure of energy absorbed *per unit mass of tissue*. A beam of radiation so confined as to deliver 1,00 r of radiation to only a carbuncle may cure the carbuncle; 1,000r delivered to the whole body will be fatal"(Glasstone et al, 1950; 425).

The significance of the text as an archive of radio relations lies precisely because of its apparent insignificance. It nestles in the shelves of every major university library in the country, and is readily available online. It is, ostensibly, a text of the military/scientific Cold War establishment, a coldly rational treatise on the implications of the atomic age. In this respect it is also, in ethico-political terms what Hannah Arendt might be paraphrased as calling the "systematicity of evil": a pathological desire of state violence to chronicle and archive its triumphs, cataloguing its power for public reference. *Aside* from being an ontographic catalogue of the birth of the atomic age, the text is an object in its own right, differing only from the Uranium 235, blastwaves, electromagnetic hypocentres and burns it represents, *only by degree*, and implicated in radioactive assemblage of all the above, and more. In a sense, a very real sense, it *is* the nuclear explosion: it does much of the *work* the bomb does itself. It is not a radio broadcast, in these sense that we have hitherto discussed radio relationalities, but nevertheless broad-casts radiation, in the sense of being a scientific text addressing this, further highlighting the need for an hybrid understanding of text *and* matter when addressing radio assemblages.

Masuji Buse's novel *Black Rain* is one of the few literary works dealing explicitly with these differential, material, afterlives of the bomb and the way in which radio waves reconstruct material-human relations. The novel engages an experiment in perspective, shifting between the journal of Yasuko and its transcription by her Aunt, along with a number of other perspectives of the period around the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima. The shifting of these perspectives and the polyvocal

structure of the narrative, incidentally, speaks precisely to the uncanny nature of survivor testimony Morton refers to above. Most distinctly, however it illustrates the negotiation between post-conflict, post-traumatic societies and the altered dynamics of relations(hips) by which they often become characterised. That electromagnetic radiation visibly and invisibly alters the way in which human beings stand in relation to each other but also their environments and everyday objects is the most powerful aspect of the text.

“(S)ome substance harmful to the body had penetrated through the skin and upset the working of the various organs, including indigestion. “You see” the man with deep-set eyes said, “the organs of the body are obviously organized like a clever piece of mechanism.” (Ibuse 2012, 119)

The manner in which objects “caricature” other objects in their surface encounters is also illustrated by Ibuse: “The bomb seemed to have encouraged the growth of plants and flies at the same time that it put a stop to human life”(Ibid, 190). These

“From the standpoint of radiation, soft tissues are invisible, yet from my point of view, they are the painful seeping lesions on my back as I recover from sunstroke, glued by lymph to the pillow in a Maltese Villa. From oil’s point of view, my car is a shallow doll’s house thimble. Yet from my point of view, oil makes America look the way it is” (Morton 2013, 79).

For over 30 years people have reported symptoms of hypersensitivity to electromagnetic fields and although there are limited studies in Europe and North America which have investigated the phenomenon report subjective symptoms including “nonspecific dermatological symptoms...neurasthenic symptoms (dizziness, fatigue, headache, difficulties in concentrating, etc.)...along with nonspecific skin disorders and ocular gastrointestinal, or respiratory symptoms” (Levallois et al 2002, 619), little empirical evidence exists to support the existence of such a condition as a diagnosable medical pathology. The scientific consensus thus remains that “[w]e have therefore been unable to find any robust evidence to support the existence of (electromagnetic hypersensitivity) as a biologic entity.” (Rubin et al 2010, 2) anxieties about the invisible fields which sustain the contemporary technological ecosphere are nevertheless transmitted in the idiomatic expressions of medical folk-wisdom “you shouldn’t hold that thing so close to your head”; or popular attitudes – it seems that people feel about as fondly for mobile phone masts being sited near their dwellings as they do about wind turbines.

That those reporting electromagnetic hypersensitivity do subjectively *feel* their symptoms seems, in many cases, beyond doubt. Much as those a hundred and fifty years previously *felt* profound physical and nervous crises upon travelling at hitherto unimagined speeds in cars or on trains. Whilst the neurochemistry of affective responses to unfamiliar technologies may be similar across time (dread, anxiety), the physical manifestation of symptoms will clearly differ (think of “phantom vibrations” reported as a generalised phenomenon in response to the ubiquity of mobile phones).

## 8.5 Electromagnetic Art

The Australian artist Joyce Hinterding’s work is also based around the “electromagnetic soup” that Morton regards as characterising the hyperobject of the spectrum. Hinterding uses sound installations and video pieces to “make sensible” the omnipresent energies of the upper atmosphere and, more recently, the man-made fields of technological society. Andrew Murphie argues that Hinterding, with her collaborator David Haines work approaches more closely than any contemporary artists the ideas of A.N. Whitehead, particularly his rejection of a bifurcation between events (or processes) and the rest of the world. Murphie points to a nascent media theory at the heart of Whitehead’s ontology, prefiguring much of McLuhan’s later media theory, suggesting that “the human body with the world as medium (is) a kind of signal transducer or modulator. The body is a “complex amplifier”...[and]...for Whitehead “the predominant basis of perception is perception of the various bodily organs, as passing on their experiences by channels of transmission and of enhancement”(Whitehead, quoted in Murphie, 2012; 4).

Whitehead’s metaphysics, involving entities as occasions in members of wider societies explicitly argues that the current technological epoch is “formed by an electromagnetic society, which is a society contained within the geometric society.

In this society yet more special characteristics obtain...The electromagnetic society exhibits the physical electromagnetic field which is the topic of physical science. The members of this nexus are the electromagnetic occasions.”(Whitehead, 1979; 91) Without issuing forth on too much of a digression, the linkages between Whitehead’s occasions and societies, Latour’s actants and networks and DeLanda’s are also evident here. Hinterding and Haines work speaks to the problematic I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, namely that electromagnetism is at once a cosmic force, but at the same time is being constantly disturbed by human electronic ecologies.



Fig. 41 Joyce Hinterding: Loops and Fields, *@Invisible Fields: Geographies of radio waves* (2011) (Photograph by the author)

More important than this, though, for our purposes here is that the idea of signal pursued in this aesthetic provocation is “not about the confirmation of known worlds but about ongoing ecological transformation. In this context, signal does not primarily “carry meaning” or messages (alternatively, we could say that signal seen this way generates an ongoing plenitude of meanings)” (Murphie Ibid, 5).

Furthermore that, “in admitting outside forces, such as atmospheric electricity, or television signal, to their artworks, Haines and Hinterding challenge a certain given-ness in the nature of assemblages...a given-ness often assumed or enforced by social/philosophical/political contract” (6). It is this given-ness, too that speculative

realism seeks to disturb, to challenge. When we cease to see objects as “for us” or at the very least inextricable from our particular, narrow mode of being, this is a positive step towards re-imagining (for example) relational ecology, human-atmospheric interactions and, ultimately, the idea of geo-politics itself: formal, practical *and* popular.

The ubiquity, yet presumed intangibility of the “ocean of transmission” within which we find humans as semi-conductors, transistors, receivers, broadcasters or targets is also explored by the designer Timo Arnell, whose work *Nearness* visualises the pervasive radio relations which exist in Near Field Communication systems (NFC), a series of technologies which allow connections between mobile phones and other physical objects. What this illustrates is that the geography of radio waves goes beyond (while at the same time being always implicated with) a simple mapping of the historical or political spaces of radio and can be found in a range of cultural interventions which attempt through various techniques, to make sense of that which it is known exists. In the language of OOO, this is engaged to access the withdrawn, whilst always recognising (if we follow Levi Bryant/ Graham Harman’s variation on the theme) that certain elements will *remain* withdrawn; that for every mode of revealing we are able to deploy, *something* will escape.

Heidegger’s view on the essential difference between modern technologies as against previous forms is also relevant again here. Heidegger, somewhat archaically, points to the sails of a windmill “which do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind’s blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it<sup>36</sup>.” (Heidegger 1966). This is inverted in the shift to modern technology. The crux of this, once again, is that the technological epoch transforms the being of things into standing reserve, to be called upon or stocked for later use. Science thus becomes the handmaiden of technology, given that:

“Science does not prepare the way for technology merely because it provides the models, explanations, and data that technology goes on to utilize; it is rather because modern science is not simply a pure contemplating of what is present in nature but is already a positing, projecting, or setting up of nature that secures it before hand in the way it can be present. If science makes ready for the challenging forth and

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<sup>36</sup> This is linked to the Islamic occasionalism drawn on by Harman in his OOO: that fire should burn cotton only demonstrates the encounter of only a series of fire and cotton’s respective properties (in the Islamic case mediated by god), rather than direct causation of one object upon another.

setting in order of technology, it is because it already “sets upon” nature, demanding that it exhibit itself in its objectness and calculability” (Foltz 1995, 12)

Art then, in response to this, as I discussed in the earlier chapter, may enable an approach to enframing which later Heidegger scholars have referred to as “gaining a free relation” to technology (Dreyfus, 1999). This is to take the view that Heidegger should not be rejected as a luddite (which he is not) or romantic primitivist, and that to be extracted from his critique of technology is the possibility of negotiating a mode of being in which technology does not exclude, through calculative thinking, (e.g.) the possibility of unconcealment. Indeed, Heidegger recognises this through his insistence on the work of art as being central to such a negotiation.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

The problem of the toxic extremities of the electromagnetic spectrum, such as ionising radiation, is one factor inhibiting human deep-space exploration. It is estimated that a peopled mission to Mars would have to contend with radiation orders of magnitude far higher than any “safe” maximum on earth, and over a longer period of time. Human bodies would become ionized, poisoned and expire before they could engage in any appreciable colonization of the surface of adjacent planets. Such a realisation is raised here because it returns us to a key concern of speculative realism raised by, the dark vitalism of Ben Woodard’s geophilosophy alluded to above; that of the mistake of lapsing into a human-centred optimism. As Woodard suggests

“One of the most unfortunate constants of science fiction is its humanistic optimism, whether secular or mythic. The unification of planets, of empires, and rebellions asserts a communitarian harmony as well as a ubiquity of civilized life.”(Woodard, 2013: 94)

Is this not the similar trajectory of the story of the spectrum I have been telling thus far? The illusionary belief in the collapsing of distance, boundaries and eventual communicative harmony brought by the instrumentalisation of the spectrum gives way to the realisation that the guarantees of world order rest on a radioactive cataclysm, and hopes of escape or secular transcendence to the stars reveals only more of the same. Away from the limited protection afforded by the earth’s atmosphere, the omnipresent radiation of the solar system and deep space beyond

displays a lethal indifference to human life. Woodard concludes that this radical openness of the universe “does not inspire optimism, only dejection” (Ibid). Speculative realism is often critiqued, partly, because of this perceived nihilism incipient to it: if there is no transcendental place to be granted to humans over and above other objects, then this is to deny even the most basic programs of meaning or ethics. I find this critique less valid with respect to the actor-networks and assemblages grounding I give here primarily because they do indeed recognise ethics as one component, amongst many, involved in these constellations. We could not, for example, detach the nested space-times in the *FooC* scripts, for example, from the series of post-colonial critiques they inspire. The infrastructural assemblages of the BBC and the DWS are inescapable from the logics of occupation and oppression which enable them; Leonard Parkin’s subjectivity is, likewise, conditioned, amongst other things, by his positionality as a white, mobile, Western journalist/travel writer.

This chapter has sought to open up the idea of the geographies of radio waves to the “dark”, the incommensurable, the toxic, and the ways in which representation (e.g. conceptual art) has tried to approach this. It shows that the history and politics of radio waves are not a uniformly progressive trajectory; that the kinds of “communication” waves are concerned with is not necessarily benign, or indeed, “for” humans. After all, the communication of the ionizing radiation of “fat man” or “little boy” with the cells of the *hibakusha* is not, in and of itself, an unimaginable horror, from the “perspective” of Uranium 235. This recalls Harman’s argument that “objects do not encounter each other in direct presence, but only as a kind of caricature or objectification—the rock did exist beforehand, but never quite in the way in which the other rock objectifies it, which requires the *perspective* of this other rock”(Harman 2002, 208).

There are, then, multiple other research sites and methodologies which are related to the geographies of radio waves which are opened up by the practice of geographies of assemblage. As Nigel Thrift writes “we live in an age of radioactive environments” (Thrift 2006, 197) and consequently it is hoped that as the main body of this thesis has illustrated some of the multiple faces of broadcast environments in a distinct historical period, further research can look to tackle the more ubiquitous

radio ecologies of the early twenty-first century. This final substantive chapter has sought to address ways in which the materiality of radio might be understood differently (again, outside of recordings). Art and aesthetic politics have recently emerged as key sites for the understanding of relations between human individuals, collective and complex non-human objects, and post-humanism more generally (e.g. Ranciere 2006). Where this links to the thesis' concerns with popular geopolitics is that if we consider the way in which Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain* articulates the relations between humans and the non-human fission particles, traces of radiation are, as an aesthetic event, a different (but equally valid) conception of the popular geopolitics of radio waves. Similarly, Fernandez's *Conet Project* is also a site of exposure to the hauntology of Cold War espionage, but also a site of resistance to the co-option of the airwaves for the potentially nefarious behaviour of secretive state actors, the interplay of the invisible fields of radio and the specific popular cultures of paranoia and conspiracy they engender. Other artistic interventions such as *Skrunda Station* or Hinterding's *Loops and Fields*, point to further emancipatory potentials for the ubiquitous radio atmospheres we find ourselves always-already within. This, I feel, should speak also to the theoretical concerns I have been trying to raise through the course of the thesis: that of a developed theory of assemblage utilised to enable an understanding of the complex relational fields of material and expression which come to construct the social, alongside the potential insights of OOO, which takes the uncertain and shifting phenomenology of objects as its starting point and which, I believe, speaks most closely to the notion of the age of radioactive environments.





# Chapter 9

## Conclusions

### 9.0 Recapitulation of central chapters & key research themes

To begin with, the thesis set out to argue radio was a central technology to the popular geopolitics of the Cold War and that theories of ANT, Assemblage and OOO, being could usefully be hybridised to address the material-discursive nature of these Cold War radio ecologies. A popular geopolitics of radio, it was argued in Chapter 2, is linked to literary critiques of travel writing and journalism, media theory and phenomenology and sociologies of organisations and identity. Synthesising the ideas of these literatures with the theoretical triad discussed above was the aim of the first part of this project. In Chapter 3, I adapted DeLanda's various, unstable cartographies of social assemblage which were seen to be relevant to entities at all scales (individuals, texts, institutions and materials), in conjunction with Latour's motifs of the messy materialities of imperial knowledge production and an account of how post-coloniality and post-colonial theories, which speak directly to the popular-geopolitical assemblage of radio could be incorporated into this framework. This foundation, alongside OOO's insistence that we take objects, *all objects* seriously in these configurations, demonstrated that the adaption, rather than wholesale adoption of various elements of these theories into a hybridised framework alongside discourse analytic methods presents the most effective way to bring them to bear on complex, inter-disciplinary sub-fields such as popular geopolitics. As a response to existing strands of popular geopolitics which still tend to over-focus on critical, discursive analytic framings and methods of reading popular cultural phenomena, I argued for a way of approaching these phenomena as sites of multiple human-non-human, material/semiotic construction, drawing examples from historical geopolitical assemblages but also from sites of material knowledge production, such as the

“newsroom”, in order to show how these theoretical registers might be read in this light.

In the most direct linkages between Actor Network theory and social assemblage, Chapter 5 engaged the BBC’s engineering archive by utilising these methods. The chapter drew on a series of registers and sites of assemblages situated in BBC radio’s technical archive in order to illustrate just some of the territorializations and deterritorializations engendered by radio during the Cold War. The chapter argued for a method of viewing the archive in light the ways in which radio assemblages are presented in the early governance regimes of radio regulation, the territorialized network, both physically and organizationally and through the circulation of radio objects within Cold War spaces. The virtue of this being that such a view does not prioritise the role of one component or set of components over another.

Engaging these kinds of critique through a reading of the archival traces of the building and maintenance of the Middle Eastern Relay network at Masirah, the chapter showed this to be a process of material and symbolic complexity in relation to the wider geopolitics of the Cold War. In addition to this, the versatility of thinking assemblage allowed further lines of flight to be explored into the historical geographies of communication, colonialism and cultural politics produced within and by these sites, allowing for the different temporalities engaged by the archive,, whilst also demonstrating the interlinking between the material and discursive formations of objects, laws, institutional bureaucracies and physical territories in which radio assemblages were manifested in the Cold War context of the BBC in the 1960’s . The second section of the chapter re-articulated these concerns in relation to the passage of radio sets themselves, as seemingly insignificant objects, within and across the visible and invisible boundaries of Cold War European political ecologies, further demonstrating how the popular geopolitics of radio should be seen in a firmly relational context, rather than as overdetermined by singularly discursive or material factors alone.

Chapter 6 directed an analytical focus to an example of a popular geopolitical serial, an object of research which has provided the basis for several previous research programs in the subfield in the past, although one which has largely been confined to

fictional texts. It addressed the question of how, in the case of this particular serial, the massive quantity of text which constitutes even a small period of “news” or “current events” can be read utilising a combination, or hybrid of discursive analytic tools alongside social assemblage. Identifying Manuel DeLanda’s claim that language constitutes a specific case of assemblage as its starting point, and employing Latour’s motifs of *inscription devices* and *centres of calculation*, the chapter looked to develop these ideas about linguistics to assess the claim that discourse analyses can be usefully supplemented by a reading of language which sees the text as an assemblage, or society of various material *and* semiotic components, acting to stabilise or destabilise any particular instance of representation. These claims, the chapter argued, whilst demonstrating a degree of materiality (as conceived of by DeLanda and other relational materialists) could be observed in certain linguistic operational formations, foreign news serials like *FooC* in the radio assemblage must still be read in light of the pioneering work of critical and post-colonial discourse analyses in popular geopolitics. This is particularly true in relation to how *FooC* scriptings can be read in relation to the generic conventions of travel writing and the post-colonial tropes and various intertextualities seen within the archived scripts.

Through its reading of particular time-slices of the *FooC* archive in this manner, the chapter also identifies how the textual assemblages created by these dynamics also the use of literary techniques such as nested time-spaces in the creation of its texts, the use of various forms of various forms of visual and affective imagery, alongside more common modes of colonial representation such as aestheticisation, exoticisation or cosmopolitan imperialism.

Continuing this further the themes of chapter 6, chapter 7 mapped the trajectories of Leonard Parkin, a BBC radio correspondent during the mid-1960’s, using the discovery of his private papers, bequeathed to Barnsley local government archives by his widow. The regular letters to his mother written during the course of his foreign postings are illustrated as an example of the manner in which individual identities can also be seen as a form of social assemblage, particularly in relation to how the professional and gendered subjectivities of journalists such as Parkin are

constructed by the interplay of various, material, symbolic and affective forces push and pull on the identity of the subject across and within temporalities. These forces are also, I argued, not limited to the various professional or personal subject positions which the professional journalist must adopt or adapt to in any given circumstance, but also encompass other objects, such as fictional texts, technologies and the affective atmospheres produced by historic events. This kind of reading contributes to existing work into the role of the journalist as a geopolitical agent, although instead of demonstrating how this might be the case through recourse to how their work might shape geopolitical realities or audience perceptions (e.g. O'Tuathail 1996b; Pinkerton 2013), it proposes that the journalist as geopolitical subjectivity is an entanglement of a wide variety of components, contexts, objects and gendered subjectivities, all of which combine to produce, at various times, the media actant of the "journalist" in an (often unstable) assemblage.

The coda to the chapter tracked back in time, to the BBC radio coverage of the British hydrogen bomb tests in 1957 to argue the case further of how the journalist, geopolitics and technology can be seen as co-produced in this kind of unstable assemblage, placing the archival narrative of the tests, and the unexplained failure of certain broadcasts to return to the required locations, in the context of Jane Bennett's agentic assemblages, where causation in complex human-technical assemblages is such that it often cannot be drawn in a "clear" manner back to one factor or, in this case, malfunction. This interpretation links back to the infrastructural assemblages of Chapter 5 which, when working perfectly, recede from presence, only to emerge through the jarring "presence-at-hand" when one of the many complex factors operating to sustain this withdrawal malfunctions. This narrative, then, further promotes the utility of linking theories of assemblage with object oriented metaphysics, given the latter's commitment to the Heideggerian analysis of the broken tool (e.g. Harman, 2002; 2010).

Having focussed, at least in part, on the role of individual subjectivities and identities in the radio assemblage in chapter 7, Chapter 8 consciously broadens this focus out again, to the widest conception of radio, that of the electromagnetic spectrum. Drawing a series of illustrations of how the radio spectrum's darker materialities could be found at various sites and ecologies of the Cold War, the chapter then mobilises OOO's concept of the *hyperobject*, to account for entities massively

distributed in time and scale to in order to illustrate how we might think the geopolitics of radio differently in light of this, expanding the focus of radio and the electromagnetic spectrum outwards to encompass the toxic afterlives of harmful gamma rays and other forms of radiation which saturated the imaginaries of the cold-war period. With examples from literary fiction, conceptual music and art and cultural theory, the concept of spectrum assemblages at various scales and intensities was explored in relation to geopolitics.

The chapter concluded the substantive section of the thesis through seeking various modes through which the complexities of the radio spectrum might be related back some of the wider issues of cultural geography, including questions of embodiment, through which radio waves can be seen to relate to certain bodies and not others at certain thresholds; through a concern with human finitude, which has structured questions related to the Anthropocene; and finally questions of art, aesthetics and the role to be played by artistic practices not simply as the object of analysis *for* scholarly work, but part of the variety of methodologies used to *produce* this work. These thematics, whilst necessarily diverse, all relate directly to the central questions posed by the broadly neo-materialist, assemblage and actor network theories engaged throughout the course of the thesis and, as such, chapter 8 stands both as a cultural-theoretical reading of these strands but also as a provocation to future research.

## **9.1 Main Contributions**

This thesis has opened up a new, previously un-cleared series of archival materials related to radio. It has contributed to popular geopolitics through the creation of a hybrid theory of assemblage and discourse analytic methods, and turning these to the empirical object of analysis of radio. It makes a contribution a different way of understanding of popular geopolitics, through a demonstration of some of the more expansive ways in which we might think of empirical studies into this subfield; as something “more-than” discursive representations of identities, arguing instead for a genuine appreciation of the material-semiotic linkages between technologies and objects producing popular geopolitical representations and the representations themselves. Through linking recent strands in socio-material thinking including

Assemblage, Actor Networks and OOO, the research also demonstrates that these theoretical tools can be turned to the analysis of geopolitics and popular culture. Furthermore, it also shows that where many of the recent works relating to these theories in human geography have focussed on studies of the present, utilising assemblage, for example, to illustrate the fractious, non-linear becoming of current socio-material worlds and worldings, we can just as easily see how these process have occurred in historical contexts, drawing on archives which contain illustrations of these material-linguistic formations.

As discussed in the earlier chapters, the thesis has been shaped by the research decisions required at various stages of its development. As I hope the speculative philosophy on which some of its ontology has rested has emphasised, this is by no means the only way things *could have been*. For instance, the encounters with the BBC's engineering archive opened up the possibilities for a longer time-frame analysis of both the MERS and other historical media infrastructures, utilising assemblage to draw more strongly on a Foucault/Kittler axis of media archaeology, where archival materialities and discourses are read by "digging under the screen, in order to reveal the technical conditions of the present as embedded in the workings of the machine- software, hardware, networks" (Parikka 2012, 38. Such a project would require engagement with further technical archives, such as those held by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), which were closed for refurbishment over the course of this thesis. However, whilst such a project holds no little interest in itself, it would require a different set of resources and interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, one which was beyond the scope of this work. In addition, decisions taken not to pursue this reflected a belief that what would be lost by neglecting the other aspects of the radio assemblage which I have addressed here (i.e. its serials, individuals, spectrum materialities) gives a strong justification for pursuing these strands which remain essential to the understanding of popular geopolitics, both historically and in the contemporary environment.

Another argument of this research has been that whilst BBC foreign affairs news, is grounded firmly within the journalistic code of accuracy and balance as professional mantras, ostensibly fictional texts emerge within and *affect* (variously), the *FooC* reports; the BBC and DWS engineering archives and also in Leonard Parkin's private letters. As I have pointed out, this hints towards a renewed appreciation of

the way in which intertextualities affect both textual and material components of popular culture. This further supports the argument that analyses of travel writing discourses should remain central to analyses of popular geopolitics in general, but also how these can be related to discussions of technological mediation.

Relating explicitly to the aims discussed in the introduction, the space of the thesis has embraced an inter disciplinary study of media, culture and geopolitics by way of taking the ethos of assemblage and, rather than “applying”, *engaging* it’s radical, discontinuous, non-linear cartographies in the study of a particular set of archives which speak to its open-ended material-semiotic world. It did not seek to, nor has it, directly imported these theories as a ready-made frame onto its empirical concerns. Rather, over the course of building the theoretical framework, it became clearer as to which sets of empirical or archival relations were more relevant than others. In a more prosaic sense, the thesis has “opened up” a series of “black boxes”, both literal and figurative; the literal box of Leonard Parkin’s letters and documents; the bringing to light of an un-seen archive; the geopolitical serial of *FooC*, similarly, although too vast to constitute a discreet research project, was viewed in light of theories of textual assemblage which will, it is hoped, open up other geopolitical serials to the same possibilities.. In light of the hybridity of the theoretical and methodological framework however, the vital role played by discourse analysis within these text assemblages was re-emphasised.

Thinking assemblage then, is perhaps a research ethos that can be brought to bear on other examples of the foreign news ecology. There are other radio programs which could benefit from this, for example, the Radio 4 program *Crossing Continents* which, like *FooC*, occupies a foreign affairs strand, but follows a more varied template on the sound documentary format, featuring numerous “field noises” to establish sense of place and the use of “two way” interviews, rather than monologue recollections offered by *FooC*. The way in which complex aural, foreign news documentaries/serials such as this create a range of intensities and illustrate a variety of subject positions by recourse to both semiotic and affective components, whilst still being prone to the problematics of cosmopolitan imperialism discussed in Chapter 5 gives grounds and justification for much further research in this area.

## 9.2 Disciplinary/Theoretical/Empirical implications

I believe the thesis' strategy for using hybridised theories of social assemblage and OOO for popular geopolitics finds substantial support from the archive. It suggests that whilst many proponents of these theories seek to emphasise their non-discursive non-textual focus, there remains a way in which a synthetic position which maintains how discourse and representation act to produce (in this case) imperial geographic imaginaries, but never in a vacuum, always supported by a vast wealth of other material objects, again, in much the same way as other historical geographers have pointed to how the practices and systems of colonialism itself were sustained and made possible by such assemblages (Legg 2009; Driver 2001 e.g.).

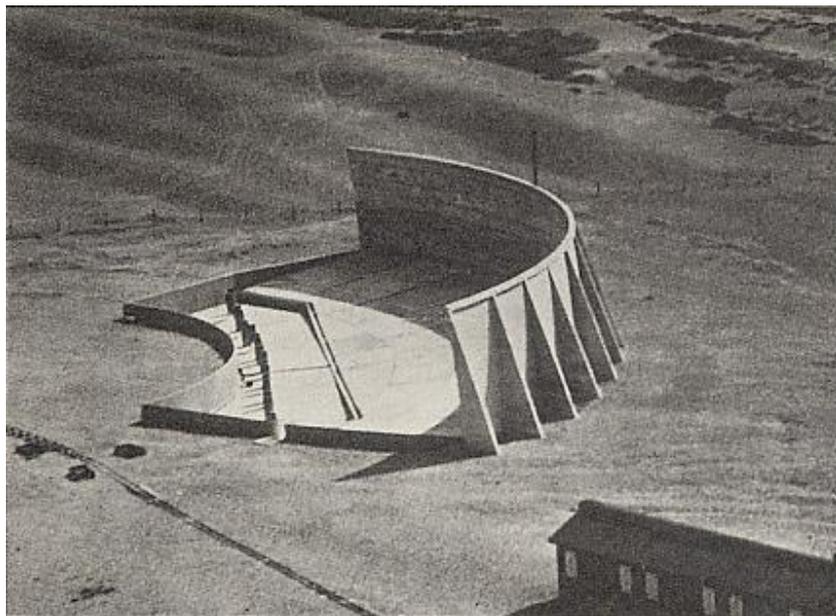
The thesis has, after all, been based on an implicit absence: writing about radio objects which are no longer "there", in the sense of being present in their original material forms: i.e. patterns of electromagnetic waves. Consequently, the project requires the acceptance of certain claims about what these materialities had subsequently become (i.e. fossilised in texts). In the last chapter I discussed Akin Fernandez's *Conet Project*, cataloguing and presenting clandestine short-wave numbers stations, which should be seen as a Cold War radio hauntology: projecting through the recovery of the past, in the present, the future which did not (or at least has not yet) come – that of the nuclear cataclysm. Contrast this to the afterlife of the *hibukasha*: the endless future of human-material radio relations: the past that moves so slowly to human perception that it seems inert. I would emphasise compatibility though: the thesis rejects the notion that assemblage/OOO theories can do meaningful explanatory work in popular geopolitics absent an account of how human actors and discursive formations exist and act through journalists, managers, engineers or civil servants within media assemblages such as the BBC. As such I have maintained throughout, and I re-iterate here, a hybridised approach to the use of assemblage theories in such research, supplementing rather than supplanting existing, critical discursive approaches. This compatibility is demonstrated in chapter 5, where the radio serial is shown to be a more or less consistent set of generic representations, but also conceivable as a linguistic assemblage, of which these tropes are just one component.

The main theoretical benefit of a hybrid assemblage/OOO approach has been that it theorises assemblage “from the ground up”, so to speak. This is to say that assemblage has proven versatile in its ability to describe and discuss the inter/intra actions of social assemblages at many scales, but in conjunction with OOO, we can see how the virtual capacities of some components “withdraw” whilst others are pushed to the fore. Technological infrastructures receded into the background in working order, but are always susceptible to bursting into presence through sudden failure of even small components; the meta-language of broadcast talk in *FooC* can be seen to stabilise at similarly different levels, from components of linguistic assemblages such as deixis through to discursive tropes found in colonial representation and images, which emphasised the need for the hybridised theory to retain existing discursive analytics in relation to post-colonial analysis of journalistic texts. Similarly, the individual correspondent as writer/broadcaster is seen through his letters to be under the constant “push” and “pull” of both material and discursive forces and objects. The thesis has shown how we might talk about objects at various scales using this hybrid approach (infrastructures, broadcast texts, individual subjects), expanding those theorists of assemblage who focus on (for example) cities, markets or states. It has shown that, with adaptation, this theoretical framework is indeed relevant to and coherent within sub-disciplines of geopolitics towards which it had not yet been directed.

This thesis sought to adopt the explicitly non-totalising, non-closed, radically open ethos of assemblage in its approach to the empirical material it covers. Nevertheless, it concludes that, as tempting and aesthetically pleasing as it might be to think it, we cannot track a pattern of waves in which “everything can (automatically) be connected to everything else”: Parkin may, in his letters, have expressed “hearing himself coming back” on the radio whilst in the Congo, however, the temptation to say that the very patterns of waves negotiated and facilitated from Masirah, coded in the *FooC* scripts and referenced by Parkin were one and the same should not draw us away from the fact that even if this were the case, then we would merely have an instant where certain material and expressive components of various assemblages associated together to form a whole *at one particular moment*. The idea that a thesis such as this might link together, neatly, with each episodic chapter linking a specific pattern of broadcast radio waves to the vectors of infrastructures, programs and

individual journalists at the exact same moment is beguiling but would defeat both the point of the research and the position of assemblage it argues for.

The fossilised materialities of radio infrastructures were discussed through text, although as alluded to in the previous chapter, there are a number of possibilities for addressing site-specific remains of the radio networks themselves. A prime example of this might be the development of geopolitical radio detection structures, from the acoustic mirrors peppering the coasts of the United Kingdom (*fig.44*), to the brutalist sublimities of nuclear early warning systems or radio telescopes. Such projects are beyond the empirical scope of this thesis but would, I argue, also take seriously the call for world politics to practice a creative ethnography in its engagement with theories of assemblage, so that these objects, structures and their relations may be allowed to speak; to attend to the margins, the seemingly insignificant, the micro - although the micro which is not necessarily regarded as a scale prior to the macro.



*Fig.44 Aerial Photograph of Denge sound mirror, Kent. Photo: Lawrence Mayes*

The popularity of assemblage and network thinking in recent years has, in part, rested on its ability to act as a descriptor for the complex, multi-layered social worlds which have come to constitute late-modern societies. Whilst it has been the aim of

this thesis to subject historical media assemblages of popular geopolitics to scrutiny, one could easily see applications for the kind of methods I have discussed to the contemporary news-media moment. In Chapter 6 I alluded to the difference in the archive of *FooC*, which is now stored and accessible in audio format from 2010 through the BBC's website. The vast shift in how news (and consequently geopolitical representations) are now produced, distributed and consumed, away from modes which privileged static, collective audience based objects such as televisions and radios, to more individualised, mobile devices such as phones and tablets opens up further avenues for research into news-media assemblages. When we consider these developments alongside the move away from traditional media organisations which select, edit and present content, towards networks such as *Twitter*, *Youtube* etc... where un-edited, self-curated content reigns, and the notion of the news-media archive itself becomes so vast and indistinct; indistinct in that it is not clear who or what is doing the archiving. Whilst it seems plausible and possible to bring assemblage theories to bear on the popular geopolitics of mass social media networks such as those mentioned above, this would require digital archival techniques, and would not enable the potential for "thick" description offered either by, for example, the script archive of *FooC* or Leonard Parkin's private letters.

Ironically, one of the initial research ideas for how to approach the BBC's archive remains and could, with a greater degree of resources, also form the basis of future research. The project has revealed that the period between 1960 and 1966 has a perfectly archived catalogue of news-scripts from *FooC* which would be of no little interest in and of themselves either individually, or as part of a comparative study between patterns of representation in the past and in the contemporary world. To re-iterate the rationale in the introduction, this did not form the basis of this project due both to questions of practicality, but also the manner in which the archive itself was revealed as more than a repository for scripted representations of the Other.

There is also significant space to engage historical geographies of assemblage: Both Stephen Legg and Andrew Davies have done this in various ways in relation to colonial assemblages, but perhaps a mixture of the methods and strategies I have adopted could be turned to a further history of technological media, prior to radio. This is to say space exists for a more detailed reading of how the materialities of early printing presses, distribution networks or postal systems can be mapped and

read in light of these theories. This, I would argue, would be a welcome development to the geographies of media, which have largely focussed on the rapid advancements in contemporary technologies. What this project has opened up is the possibilities of using assemblage/networked theories to read historical modes of communication. Perhaps this should not surprise us, given that both Latour and DeLanda have written extensively on the non-linear and emergent modes through which history is produced. In a sense, then, the history of media assemblages as they relate to political geography has yet to be written, although it can be found in the germ of, for example, Habermas' writings on the transformation of the public sphere, these ideas have not yet been systematically approached in relation to the material architectures enabling and sustaining them.

It is worth remembering that Marconi, the great scientific pioneer of radio transmission, held exceedingly esoteric views with regards to the medium's potential. As one critic has put it, "[h]e (Marconi) became convinced that sounds, once generated, never die, they simply become fainter and fainter until we no longer perceive them. Marconi's hope was to develop sufficiently sensitive equipment, extraordinarily powerful and selective filters I suppose, to pick up and hear these past sounds. Ultimately, he hoped to be able to be able to hear Christ delivering the Sermon on the Mount" (Bryars 2008, cited in Fisher 2014, 145). In this way, the thesis has, stylistically, sought to resurrect a similar modernist sensibility, married with the tools of assemblage, to listen in to the written radio archive in precisely this kind of manner.



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CO 1015/1646

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FO 953/2239

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Barnsley Archives and Local Studies

*From Our Own Correspondent* Web Archive, available at  
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<sup>37</sup> Individual document references, where available are included within the text or figure captions. The letters of Leonard Parkin, on which chapter 7 drew, were entirely uncatalogued, and hence required the creation of an appropriate in-text system, which adopts the format (LP/dd/m/yyyy) for each letter.

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'Khrushchev in Indonesia' by Anthony Lawrence, Read by Alan Skempton, *From our Own Correspondent*, No. 117 Saturday 5th March, 1960, (My emphasis)

'Khrushchev in Afghanistan' by Charles Wheeler, *From our own Correspondent* No. 117, 5th March 1960.

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'Travelling Statesmen' by Thomas Cadett, *From our own Correspondent* No.117, 5th March, 1960

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