The Royal Tour of 1939 as a Media Event

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ABSTRACT This article examines three radio broadcasts from the royal tour of 1939, namely those covering the departure of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth from Niagara Falls, Ontario, on their way to visit the United States on June 7, 1939. The analysis contributes to the debate about the function of “media events” sparked by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz’s eponymous 1992 book. While Dayan and Katz argue that historic national televised ceremonies enhance community loyalty and integration, their critics suggest that they place too little emphasis on issues of hierarchy and power, especially the power of the media themselves. This study concludes that by their effective use of radio to exploit the symbolism of monarchical ceremony, natural spectacle, and international portals, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s announcers helped to legitimize and augment the authority of the fledgling Canadian public broadcaster.

KEYWORDS Radio; Radio history; Public broadcasting; CBC; Media events

Introduction

The royal tour of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Canada and the United States in May and June 1939 marked the first visit of a reigning monarch to North America. It attracted a great deal of media attention in Canada, the United States, Britain, and elsewhere. Newspapers especially had a heyday, publishing reams of sto-
ries and pictures on front pages, in special supplements, and in commemorative booklets. The tour also provided Canada's recently created public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), with the opportunity to legitimate itself and its public service mandate in a continental environment long dominated by commercial radio. Through its extensive coverage of the tour, and with a little help and guidance from the BBC, the CBC was able to demonstrate that it could coordinate a huge national spectacle efficiently, effectively, and in both English and French, an endeavour far beyond the capacity of Canadian private broadcasters (Potter, 2006; Vipond, 2003, 2007). For over a month, their majesties' activities were broadcast daily for a national Canadian audience, and feeds were provided to the BBC and the three American networks. The fledgling public broadcaster spent a huge amount of time, money, and effort on the tour, and it all came off almost perfectly. The royal tour prepared and positioned the CBC, the only national media network, to be a credible voice of authority in Canada during World War II, a period often described as the Corporation's "golden age."

The royal tour occurred at an important moment in the history of the English-speaking peoples of the North Atlantic. It came on the heels of the abdication of George's older brother, Edward VIII, in a period when Canada's role within the empire/commonwealth was evolving to full nationhood, and amidst rising dread about the possibility of war with Germany and apprehension about the willingness of the United States to participate in another European war. This foreign policy context, which has been the subject of most of the sparse academic literature on the tour, is not my main interest here. Nor do I intend to discuss the tour as a whole, its massive press coverage, the activities and speeches of the king and queen, or the response of Canadians to their presence. Rather, this article is about how the CBC announcers' performance in covering the tour worked as social discourse. It analyzes three specific broadcasts to suggest that a close reading of their texts complicates Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's (1992) argument that "media events" are inclusive and consensual ceremonies that bind together modern societies at special moments, transforming audiences into publics. The principal argument is that while the CBC's coverage certainly played to the tour's underlying, and socially integrative, themes of monarchical loyalty, imperial ties, and national pride, it also subtly (and sometimes not-so-subtly) reinforced social hierarchies and celebrated its own role in the construction of Canadian identity. The CBC was central to making the royal tour a media event; the media event also helped to make the CBC a national cultural institution.

Radio broadcasting began in Canada in the early 1920s as private enterprise, financed either by commercial interests such as newspapers or by third-party advertisers. Within 10 years about 80 stations had been set up, although many were small and weak both financially and in transmission power. National networking was too expensive for owners or advertisers to sustain and occurred only intermittently. Moreover, the powerful stations of the United States, the world leader in broadcasting as entertainment, could be heard in most Canadian homes, and the two main American networks, NBC and CBS, established affiliated stations in Montréal and Toronto by the early 1930s. Propelled by flaws in the regulatory system and by concern that radio might be lost as
a national medium of communication, the Conservative government of R. B. Bennett in 1932 created the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC), a publicly owned broadcaster and regulator financed by receiver licence fees and authorized to construct the only coast-to-coast radio network. The CRBC was not a monopoly government broadcaster like the BBC, however; private stations continued to exist and in some cases to affiliate with the Commission as part of its network. The CRBC was beset by both organizational and political problems; in late 1936 it was disbanded by a newly elected Liberal government and replaced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), with similar public service and networking responsibilities. Under an experienced and ambitious general manager, Gladstone Murray, the CBC quickly began hiring staff, building powerful stations, expanding coverage and creating new programming. It also strove to enhance its institutional and cultural legitimacy and authority. The royal tour gave it the opportunity to demonstrate to the country, the continent, and the world that the CBC should be considered the Canadian broadcaster, the voice of Canada. In practice, the CBC’s “voice” was that of the managers, writers, and announcers who created its programs, and special events programs such as the tour provided the most important showcase for its abilities and its unique mandate.

This article examines the live broadcast of one small segment of the 1939 royal tour, as their majesties’ train left Niagara Falls, Ontario, on June 7, 1939, for their four-day visit to the United States, and compares it with two other narratives aired the same day: the live NBC coverage of the arrival of the royal train at Niagara Falls, New York, and the “highlights” program re-broadcast on the CBC network later that night. While on the one hand a local event in a small community, the border crossing also spoke to one of the most important messages of the tour, reaffirming the ties between the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. More particularly it demonstrated the close relationship between the two North American neighbours, permanently linked as they were by geography, history, commerce, culture, and multiple lines of communication, including railway tracks and radio networks. Although it is often assumed that the publicly owned Canadian and the commercially driven American radio networks embodied very different cultural visions, in fact they had many points
in common, and CBC officials regularly corresponded, met, and shared policy information with their American counterparts, particularly those at NBC. Because the CBC was not fully funded by listeners' licence fees, it also had to depend on advertising revenue and therefore on attracting audiences habituated to American popular culture. Thus a direct line from New York fed such popular NBC programs as *The Jack Benny Show* and *Fibber McGee and Molly* to CBL, the main Toronto station, from which they were relayed across Canada. When the king and queen crossed the international border at Niagara Falls they were physically transferred from Canadian to American soil via a railway bridge, symbolically transferred from the hands of “Johnny Canuck” into those of “Uncle Sam,” and rhetorically transferred from the CBC to the NBC announcers (Callan, 1939). The successful broadcast of the passage of the king and queen between Canada and the United States enhanced the status of the CBC by demonstrating its integral role in a continental broadcasting system.

That this crossing-over occurred at Niagara Falls is likewise culturally and symbolically significant. Given the many rail links between Canada and the United States, the passage could have occurred at many other points. During his 1860 tour the future Edward VII, for example, chose to enter the United States at Detroit, and the future Edward VIII in 1919 at Rouses Point, New York. Both also, however, like many other tourists from all over the world since the early nineteenth century (and including the future George V in 1901), visited Niagara Falls, one of the continent’s greatest natural wonders, and one shared by Canada and the United States. By 1939 Niagara Falls encapsulated many sometimes contradictory messages. While it still retained some of its aura as an “icon of the sublime” (McKinsey, 1985), it was also a pre-eminent (and by then rather tawdry) tourist destination, the “honeymoon capital of the world,” a prodigious source of hydroelectric power, and thus the site of substantial industrial development. As a massive geological formation developed and moulded by human hands over more than a century, it was simultaneously the embodiment of the terror and rapture of nature and of mass-market leisure consumption, a “place of transformation” that blurred the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary (McGreevy, 1994, pp. xii, 158). By virtue of their location straddling the international border, the falls also blurred the boundary between Canada and the United States, becoming a liminal space in which similarities and differences jostled for attention. A few hours after viewing the falls from the Canadian side, the king and queen quickly and easily crossed the international boundary. As I will argue later, they too, as persons and as symbols, embodied a potent mixture of the ordinary and the extraordinary as they passed from the British dominion over which they ruled to the great republic where they were just visitors, albeit very special ones. The programming of June 7, 1939, then, was a routine presentation of a local event along the trajectory of the tour, but it was also more than that. Its texts in their different ways echoed universal themes of nature, spectacle, humanity, tradition, power, and transformation.

**Media events**

In the past couple of decades a rather large literature has developed around a debate about what happens to rituals and ceremonies when they are communicated by the mass media. The founding text is Dayan and Katz’s 1992 book, *Media Events: The Live*
Broadcasting of History. The authors define media events, which they term “high holidays of mass communication,” as significant “historic” ceremonies broadcast live on television that interrupt its normal flow. These are occasions not initiated by the media, but by others (society’s leaders); they are presented with respect and reverence and celebrate reconciliation and consensus. Among other events, Dayan and Katz examine John F. Kennedy’s funeral, the moon landing, Pope John Paul II’s visit to Poland, and the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. One of the central tenets of their argument is that when media events move beyond their actual locations into the living rooms of the nation and the world, sacred time and space are moved outward in a way that creates a new kind of collective participation. While conceding that those watching a ceremony on television have a different experience from those actually present, Dayan and Katz argue that it is not a poorer one. Television commentators work very hard in various ways to compensate for the loss of “presence,” to erase the distance and to simulate participation. They provide narrative, anecdotes, and interpretation those in situ lack; they explain and promote the technical innovations that in fact allow better and multiple vantage points; and they regularly remind their audiences that they are part of a larger, possibly even national or international, community of listeners.

Given that events of this type are widely advertised in advance, Dayan and Katz suggest that the audience members often attend in small groups, in the home (now reconstituted as a public space), “concentrating on the symbolic center, keenly aware that myriad other groups are doing likewise, in a similar manner and at the same time” (p. 146). “Instead of a pale equivalent of the ceremonial experience,” they write, the broadcast media event provides a different but equally significant “experience of being there” (p. 100). Although they occasionally point out that these events sharpen hierarchies and reinforce the status quo, Dayan and Katz generally prefer to read them as inclusive celebrations of order and consensus that function to bind society together around the symbolic performance of what its members, near and far, hold in common. “These broadcasts integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty to the society and its legitimate authority,” they write (p. 9; emphasis in original). The journalists who reverently preside over these events, they suggest, play an “almost priestly role,” “suspend[ing] their normally critical status and treat[ing] their subject with respect, even awe” (p. 5). Commentary is restricted to description and explanation, providing the audience with a story line that frames the event and construes its meanings; the language used is elevated, ornamental, celebratory. “The ordinary, concise, terse, matter-of-fact style of the journalist opens itself to cosmic lyricism” (pp. 38, 108). Thus the media organizations involved demonstrate that they can be “consensual” and “capable of alliance with authorities”; they gain status, credibility and respectability, and a proud sense of professional achievement (pp. 193-195).

Dayan and Katz’s argument has of course not convinced everyone (see Rothenbuhler, 1998, chapter 8, for a good summary of the critiques). Some deny that ceremonies accessed via the media retain their magic. Daniel Boorstin (1961), for example, deplores the seductive appeal of the manufactured artificiality of what he labels “pseudo-events.” Paddy Scannell suggests that the “sacred aura” of an event is
lost because television viewers participate “without involvement”; they can behave as they please as individuals in their own living rooms without the “constraints” imposed on those actually present (1995, pp. 152-153). While Scannell concedes that something special is occurring when vast numbers of people watch (or listen to) a ceremony, he likens it more to a theatrical performance, a spectacle rather than a ritual, transparent enough to enable the audience to reflect critically on it. Another group of critics feels that Dayan and Katz fall too often into the assumption that media events express society’s “centre” rather than constructing it; in other words, that they fail to make the symbolic power of the media to construct reality central to their analysis. Nick Couldry, for example, argues that the way media present ritual and ceremony helps to create a false sense of a social centre and to place themselves in a “privileged relationship” with that constructed centre (2003, p. 56). The media, in Couldry’s view, by articulating “contingent and historically specific . . . patterns of power” (p. 35), in fact naturalize inequalities in social power, especially the power of the media itself. By focusing too much on audiences and not enough on media institutions, then, Dayan and Katz’s analysis misses a vital aspect of the process. This is particularly relevant to this study of the CBC and the royal tour. Internal documents show clearly that the CBC personnel involved were fully conscious of the ways in which the tour coverage could (and did) enhance the Corporation’s centrality in Canadian life (Vipond, 2003). As Bob Bowman, the head of the CBC’s special events department, wrote tongue-in-cheek to a friend at the BBC just after the tour ended: “We seem to have come out of the excitement quite successfully. In fact, for the first time in our history, CBC seems to be popular. Do you think you could persuade the King and Queen to come back to Canada in two or three years from now?” (Bowman to de Lotbinière, 1939).

Before turning to a brief recapitulation of the other literatures that serve as background to this study, a word must be said about the fact that virtually all the scholarly debate on media events concerns television. This turns on two factors. The first is that Dayan and Katz’s definition requires liveness, which means that newspapers and other print media are not included, and secondly, and more generally, that it requires a “medium of national integration” (p. 23). In the period and countries they were studying, only television qualified (but see Wardle & West, 2004). Nevertheless, I would argue that the royal tour on CBC Radio in Canada fulfilled most of the criteria Dayan and Katz use to define a media event, specifically in their category of “Coronations.” The tour was organized by others, it was broadcast live, it interrupted routine broadcasting and was heavily advertised in advance; moreover, it was received in the home, often by family and other groupings, and across a large national territory and beyond. As will be argued below, the CBC staff for the most part treated the tour with the earnestness and seriousness that Dayan and Katz describe for television broadcasters. In both instances as well, the narration and interpretation provided by the broadcasters altered and arguably enhanced the experience for listeners. This being said, however, of course radio is different from television in its lack of visuality, and this is a very significant difference. As I will demonstrate, one of the principal techniques employed by the CBC’s commentators was the painting of what they called “word” or “sound” pictures. Lacking visuals, they (like other radio professionals of the period and since)
quite explicitly attempted to fill the lacuna with descriptive anecdotes that created images in the minds of their listeners. Additionally, they made every possible use of the sounds available to them—horses trotting, engines chugging, bells pealing, crowds cheering, bands playing, children singing—to emphasize the symbolic extraordinariness of the event. Nevertheless, these devices cannot substitute for actually seeing what is happening. Moreover, as Scannell (1995) pointed out, in a televised ceremony, the words of the announcer and the images on the screen may contradict one another, thus allowing for alternative readings of its meanings. It can be argued that radio announcers in many respects have fuller control over the messages of the event, for they can choose what to report and what to omit.6

These intriguing similarities and differences make a deeper analysis of the 1939 royal tour within the “media events” framework not only possible but productive. One very evident flaw in Dayan and Katz’s book is its lack of empirical research (Phillips, 1999). Several of the scholars involved in the debate over what are termed “mediatized” rituals have called for more contextualized and historicized empirical studies to deepen our understanding of exactly how they work (Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2001). This analysis attempts to do just that—to offer a more extended and precise examination of the journalistic texts and performances of one significant mid-twentieth-century media event, but one that occurred on radio.

**Monarchical ceremonies**

Most contemporary academics agree that the role and representation of the monarchy in the United Kingdom (and by extension the settler colonies such as Canada) since the beginning of the eighteenth century has undergone several transformations, and that we cannot understand the meaning of royal ceremonies without historicizing them. David Cannadine (1983) argues that there have been four phases to the ceremonial image of the British monarchy since 1820. It was the second phase, from 1877 to 1918, that saw the full flowering of “invented traditions,” when “old ceremonials were staged with an expertise and appeal which had been lacking before, and when new rituals were self-consciously invented to accentuate this development”—despite the fact, or more accurately because, the real power of the monarchy was in decline and the whole society was undergoing rapid industrial transformation (1983, pp. 108, 121-122). We need, then, to understand the twentieth-century monarchy not only as an institution but also as a “cultural performance,” an “imaginative articulation ... of symbolic density” (Chaney, 2001, p. 210).

According to Cannadine these events are organized from the centre of social power; they are top-down affairs, designed to persuade ordinary people “to acquiesce in a polity where the distribution of power is manifestly unequal and unjust” (Cannadine, 1987, p. 19). Even William Kuhn (1996), who disagrees with what he sees as Cannadine’s polemical and Marxist approach, and believes that there was as much continuity as invention in the ceremonials of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, concedes that Cannadine’s argument shows that “the monarchy of the First World War was a good deal more secure, more popular and more prestigious than it had been a hundred years earlier, and that ceremony contributed to that change” (p. 9). Although historians differ somewhat on dates, many also see the Victorian/Edwardian age as the...
period when the image of the monarchy began to be domesticized and feminized, partly because of the presence of a woman on the throne, but also through Victoria’s (and Albert’s) deliberate placing of the focus on the “royal family” as a surrogate for all bourgeois British (and white imperial) families in the same context of the social pressures of modernization (Craig, 2003; Davies, 2001).

The rise of the mass media was integral to this transformation in the image of the monarchy. John Plunkett (2003) aptly calls Victoria the “first media monarch.” Her “civic publicness” was not just a product of revamped ceremonies, but of the rise of new technologies and media—telegraphs, trains, mass newspapers, popular periodicals, engravings, photographs, cartes-de-visites, and so on. While the media were very good at promoting and depicting special ceremonial events, where they particularly specialized was in offering what we would today call human interest stories about the royal family, “personalized narratives” that provided an “illusion of intimacy” which at least one scholar thinks probably “did more to generate and sustain interest in the monarchy than did state ceremonials, which by their nature were infrequent and impersonal” (Craig, 2003, p. 174).

Like Couldry, Plunkett argues that by the extensive coverage of the queen and her family the various media institutions were also making their own mythology, promoting their own centrality as they “constantly enacted what they claimed simply to describe” (Plunkett, 2003, p. 38). In both aspects—in the publication of family vignettes and photos and in the mutual interests satisfied thereby—the new approach to the representation of the monarchy paralleled the rise of celebrity culture in the same period. Charles L. Ponce de Leon (2002) suggests that beginning in the late nineteenth century in the United States, and fully developed by the end of the 1920s, journalism and the mass media, for reasons related to their own evolution and needs, provided celebrities with a visibility (fame) that made them seem “at once extraordinary and real: complex, interesting ‘human beings’ whose unique talents and gifts are accompanied by traits that are commonplace and familiar to ordinary people” (p. 13). The Hollywood film industry, in particular, created “stars” with doubled personas, simultaneously characters (representations) and real people; as the 1930s progressed, the emphasis increasingly was placed on their real, or typical, characteristics while they continued, nevertheless, to embody a special “magic” (Dyer, 1979).

The same trajectory toward the “rapprochement of Royal and ‘ordinary’” (Nairn, 1988, p. 11) is seen in the changing image of the royal family in this period, especially in the high-profile celebrity status of the glamorous Prince of Wales right up to the point that he inherited the throne and then abdicated (Mayhall, 2007). His brother George VI embodied the alternative model of celebrity, that of the hard-working homebody whose shyness and dedication magnified his stature—much assisted by the vital “personal dynamism” of his wife (Davies, 2001, p. 61). David Chaney (2001) has argued that the representation of the royal family as “ordinary folks” yet at the same time the embodiment of a “semi-sacred institution” creates an “incompatible narrative” (pp. 212-214) that poses the danger of turning the royals into nothing more than secular celebrities. He identifies the decision to broadcast the coronation of George VI, a decision rooted in the need to re-legitimize the monarchy after the abdi-
cation crisis, as a turning point in the trend toward the transformation of monarchi-
cal tradition into mass entertainment. Certainly the consequences of that trend were
much in evidence by the late 1990s, when he was writing. Nevertheless, I would argue
that the royal family are also different from most celebrities, and that they were cer-
tainly so in Canada in 1939. They were celebrities by birth, not achievement, and they
embodied the weighty tradition and heritage of the nation/empire (Olechnowicz,
2007). Like all stars, their images played upon the doubleness of ordinary/extraordi-
ary. But the extraordinariness of the king and queen carried with it a mystique, a
charisma that placed them in a different category entirely, at the apex of all
social hierarchies (Couldry, 2001; Nairn, 1988).

Different scholars have constructed different timelines for the gradual process by
which media representations of the monarchy were transformed into the potent mix-
ture of ceremony and ordinariness they achieved by the late 1930s. Ross McKibbin
(1998, p. 3) suggests that “the modern … monarchy, partly magical, partly domestic,
and very public, was largely, though not entirely, a product of the interwar years.” One
reason for emphasizing this period is the contribution made by the new medium of
radio. Specifically, after about 1925, under its director-general Sir John Reith, the BBC
played a major role in constructing monarchical ceremonies as simultaneously
national/imperial and family events, and in carrying them to the hearthsides of
Britain and the empire (MacKenzie, 1986; Scannell & Cardiff, 1991). While according
to British media historian, Paddy Scannell, the Dean of Westminster refused to allow
the wedding of the future George VI and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon to be broadcast
in 1923 “for fear that men in public houses would listen with their hats on” (1995,
p. 152), George V had delivered several broadcast speeches by the end of the 1920s and
in 1932 Reith persuaded him to air a special Christmas message to Britain and the
empire. Within a couple of years the king had perfected a “simple, direct and per-
sonal” Christmas talk in which he spoke to his listeners as the father of a “great and
widespread family” (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991, pp. 282–283). The king’s voice was
friendly, intimate, personal. He came across not as an aloof superior speaking of
abstractions like imperial unity but as a family man, sharing his Christmas joy with
other families throughout the empire.

Notably, the 1932 Christmas broadcast was also the first program aired by the
national network of the CRBC. Throughout the 1930s, the great ceremonial occa-
sions—the Silver Jubilee of George V, his funeral, and the coronation of George VI—
as well as many events of lesser import were broadcast live not only on the BBC but
also by shortwave to the empire, including again the national network of the CRBC
and CBC. Thus although Canadians were not exposed to the activities of the royal fam-
ily as much as people in the United Kingdom, and although many Canadians’ sense
of an imperial identity was fading in the interwar years, nevertheless any consumer of
the Canadian mass media, including newsreels, feature films, newspapers, magazines,
and radio, could not avoid regular exposure to monarchical doings.5 Radio presenta-
tions of monarchical events were not uniform in tone, however. The Christmas broad-
casts were deliberately, and most effectively, low-key, playing to radio’s strength as an
intimate medium consumed in the home. The more ceremonial events were adapted
for radio by combining the announcers’ personalized, natural human voices with pomp and formality, particularly in descriptions of officials and their parades, and by the use of martial music (Reith and his imitators were particularly fond of Elgar). Both aurally and in content, these broadcasts oscillated between public and private modes, between the drama of the public spectacle and the privacy of the family living room, thereby blurring the distinction (Johnson, 1983). They furnished what Jason Loviglio, in writing about Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s use of radio in the mid-1930s, has aptly termed “public intimacy,” conflating the private listening experience with the construction of national identity (Loviglio, 2005, p. 9). The following analysis of three tour broadcast scripts will centre on these issues of tone, text, and presentation.

The royal visit to Niagara Falls, June 7, 1939
The king and queen’s tour of Canada commenced with their disembarkation from the Empress of Australia in Québec City on May 17, 1939. They travelled by a special royal train to Vancouver, by ship to Victoria, and then back to southern Ontario, stopping frequently along the way. Between June 7 and 11 they spent four days in the United States, including visits to Washington, New York, and President Roosevelt’s family home in Hyde Park, New York. The royal party came back into Canada near Sherbrooke, Québec, visited various communities in the Maritime provinces, and then on June 15 boarded the Empress of Britain at Halifax to sail back across the Atlantic (with a brief stop in the colony of Newfoundland on the way). Two teams of CBC broadcasters leapfrogged the royal train as it travelled across the country. All the major public events and many smaller ones were broadcast live regionally and/or nationally. (Private broadcasters also provided coverage of local events in their communities, under the supervision of the CBC.) In addition a 15- or 30-minute program encapsulating the day’s highlights was aired each night after the national network news summary, originating in the Toronto studios of the CBC. To facilitate the insertion of “actuality” excerpts into the latter program, the live broadcasts were recorded and hastily transcribed. Luckily for historians, both the 40 hours of recordings and the transcripts have been preserved at Library and Archives Canada, as well as the scripts of the highlights programs.

At about 9:00 p.m. on the warm and pleasant evening of June 7, 1939, a crowd gathered at the train station in Niagara Falls, Ontario, to wait for the royal couple to arrive by car from a private dinner before re-boarding their train to cross the bridge into the United States. The CBC’s live network broadcast of the event, which lasted less than 25 minutes, describes this scene, ending with the departure of the train southward (figuratively speaking—the actual direction was almost due east). The NBC live broadcast recounts the arrival of the train on American soil a few minutes later and the short ceremony of welcome to their majesties and their entourage. The CBC’s network re-broadcast at 11:15 p.m. covered the whole long day (the king and queen had also visited London, Hamilton, St. Catharines, and numerous smaller communities and, of course, had spent 10 or 15 minutes viewing the famous falls), but the re-broadcast focused particularly on the departure to the United States. This segment of the tour has been chosen for close analysis partly for its typicality, in that the announcers’ words and voices were very similar to those of the other live broadcasts I have listened
to. It was, however, a supplementary broadcast arranged owing to popular demand; usually the CBC did not cover evening tour events, among other reasons because that meant cancelling commercially sponsored scheduled programs (Murray to Bushnell, 1939, June 3). It has also been selected because it offers an opportunity to closely compare Canadian with American radio announcing of the occasion. Moreover, the June 7 late-evening highlights program is an excellent example of a scripted tour presentation, particularly in its rhetorical evocation of the historical, popular cultural, and symbolic meanings of the passage at Niagara.

The CBC live broadcast
The live broadcast from the Niagara Falls, Ontario, railway station begins with the authoritative voice of 29-year-old Bob Bowman, head of the CBC's Special Events Department, and the man in charge of the tour coverage. He offers a brief welcome and then turns the listeners over to Rooney Pelletier, an experienced bilingual network announcer from Montréal. Both Bowman and Pelletier had spent time in the previous few years at the BBC, and one hears in their voices not only quiet authority but a slightly British tinge. Pelletier and a second announcer, T. O. Wiklund, carry the burden of the 23-minute presentation. All three men had been with the tour throughout, so they had considerable experience by this time. Their tone is for the most part conversational and chatty, well suited to the intimacy of radio listening. Their ad-libbed sentences are usually short if not exactly crisp or lively. They convey spontaneity in their occasional small grammatical slip-ups, pauses, and use of personal pronouns. Simultaneously, however, their tones evoke a certain gravity suitable to the momentous occasion, and also at times a restrained but noticeable excitement. To the modern ear, their voices sound somewhat thin, but this is probably a consequence of the quality of the recording equipment and the acoustics of the open-air venue.

Like the other broadcasters recruited for the tour, they had undergone several days of special training for this assignment in early May, which included not only instructions in correct terminology but the study of recordings of other royal events that the BBC had helpfully shipped to Toronto. At the two-day training session CBC General Manager Gladstone Murray (who had himself spent many years with the BBC) had advised them to aim for "quiet confidence," "ease of manner," "balance," "reserve," and "poise," as well as "accurate, natural, and attractive description," while avoiding "facetiousness, or the appearance of confusion or slackness." "You must convey the sense of enthusiasm and excitement without becoming speechlessly ecstatic," he had recommended, and then had added: "When Their Majesties look well and pleased, it is desirable to say so. Otherwise, do not comment on their appearance" ("Synopsis of Remarks of the General Manager," 1939). The burden of the training in formal and respectful neutrality may be summed up in the injunction (which was not always honoured) that they were never to refer to themselves as announcers (this was a special event, not a news broadcast) or as commentators (which suggested opinion) but rather as "observers" or "eyewitnesses" (Murray to Bushnell, 1939, May 22). The following transcription (King's Tour Sound Recordings, 1939) of the first three minutes of the broadcast cannot convey its aural elements, but it does reveal some of the
characteristic—and exceptional—aspects of their presentation. The marks indicate a slight pause or hesitation; noticeably rising pitch and volume are also indicated.

Bowman: The Royal Visit

And now we come to the last of our actuality broadcasts for a few days as the king and queen are coming to board the royal train and cross into the United States for their four-day visit. There’s a tremendous crowd here at Niagara Falls’ station and the send-off will be something that will not be forgotten [volume and pitch rising] for a long long time. Our observers are ready to describe the scene for you from a position [volume and pitch rising] close to the royal train.

Pelletier:

I’m standing in one of the CNR buildings overlooking the brilliantly lighted square just outside the station here at Niagara Falls where their majesties are going to depart—from which their majesties are going to depart shortly for the United States. Just in front of me here there are bleachers, whole lines of them, filled with a gay crowd of people waiting for the appearance of their majesties who just a few minutes ago left the hotel where they had dinner in private and [volume rising on “and,” then a pause and falling again] left the hotel on their way here to the station. The people over here are very gay; they are in a jolly mood. They are singing and have been for the last fifteen minutes. [pause] Around the square are guards of honour. Soldiers have been lined up for an hour at least containing the crowds, maintaining order, and making it a very colourful scene indeed. Of course the place is brilliantly floodlit; from the four corners of this square great arcs of light pour down on the square. I can see RAF men, I can see soldiers in khaki with white belts and white slings for their guns. It adds quite a touch. And right here, right at my feet, right in front of me, are great long lines of veterans carrying flags. I was going to say dozens of flags and stopped but it is literally dozens of flags, there must be two dozens of [sic] flags here being held by proud men awaiting for [sic] the approach of their majesties. And still nearer to the spot where I’m speaking—from which I’m speaking to you—there is a band, a kilted band, pipers. I imagine they’re going to pipe their majesties off to the train as it slowly rumbles out of this station here at Niagara Falls. There’s a long scarlet carpet leading from the centre of the station square here right to the end of the train where their majesties will mount. And standing in the middle of the square is the mayor of Niagara Falls and his wife. [noise of barked orders and cheers rising in background] They’re accompanied by an official, scarlet-coated, wearing a cocked hat and feathers. To the right here of the square are the dignitaries of Niagara Falls. [Pipe music strikes up (“The Road to the Isles,” followed by a reel); announcer is silent for two minutes.]

After several minutes of further time-filling description of the scene Pelletier switches to the microphone of T. O. Wiklund, positioned on a platform right beside the train, for a summary of what he can see and also some fill-in material regarding past and future
tour events. When the signal comes that the royal party is about to arrive, Wiklund excitedly turns the announcing back to Pelletier, who again provides commentary over the noise of the crowd along with a detailed description of the actions of their majesties, the mayor, and the other officials in the centre of the square. Again we hear the bands, and “God Save the King” is sung, followed by three cheers for the king (and a fourth—the “tiger”). Pelletier is silent during the loudest of the crowd’s cheers, and of course during the national anthem. After considerably more description of the scene and the actions of the main performers, he ends on a plaintive note: “How soon will their majesties leave us, and leave us no more chance of cheering.” The microphone is then transferred to Wiklund again, who describes the sight of the train slowly pulling out of the station, with the king and queen on the rear platform, waving, “very tired looking” but nevertheless “happy indeed.” The commentary ends on a colloquial note: “We’ll say bye-bye until we see them in Sherbrooke in the province of Quebec.” An announcement from Bowman that for the next four days the tour coverage will be handled by American radio personnel follows, and then network identification.

Beyond this brief overview, the recording may be analyzed for two intertwined elements: what, for the broadcasters, seems to be the essence of this royal ceremony, and how do they approach the task of conveying that meaning to their listeners? First, of course, is the fact that, as Dayan and Katz argued, the announcers provide no critical commentary whatsoever. They are not analysts of the event but participants in it, celebrators of its essential elements of respect, ceremony, and hierarchy. Most importantly, we may tease out the issue of the authority of the broadcasters, and by extension of the CBC. Pelletier and Wiklund project the authority, and the privilege, of their position through a number of devices. Most obviously, they do so through their ability to choose what to describe and how. The listeners are dependent upon the “word pictures” they paint. The more detail they provide, and the more colourful it is, the more the listening experience is enhanced. Thus the spatial placement of the crowds, the bands, the officials, etc. is carefully delineated, and detail is piled upon colourful detail—the “line of scarlet mounties,” the “veritable sea of bobbing red periscopes,” the long lines of veterans in maroon berets, the strings of flags overhead, the searchlight reaching up into the dark, overcast, and “rather mysterious” sky. From the moment the royal couple’s car stops in the centre of the square, the description thickens. The queen steps out; then the king. Their appearance (she is in a “blue ensemble,” the king in a dark suit carrying, Pelletier thinks, a bowler hat) and their every movement is recounted—they chat with the mayor, he inspects the troops, she chats with the prime minister, they shake hands with some police officers, and then they slowly walk to the train, where they shake even more official hands before mounting the steps. The scrupulousness of the recounting, the exquisite detail, the images evoked, all signalled that the CBC announcers were recording an extremely important event, and one they anticipated would be remembered (and perhaps replayed), as Bowman put it, “for a long long time.” The CBC was thus at the “centre” of a moment of great symbolic importance, and by extension, at the “centre” of Canadian society.

The authority of the announcers is enhanced not only by the power of their narratives but also by the way they self-referentially position themselves. This is particu-
larly noticeable in Wiklund’s segments, where he is careful to point out that he is so close to the train that he could climb right onto it—if not for the mounties on guard. As the train pulls away he is in another privileged position, on a “high platform” from which he can survey the whole scene, which is of course invisible to the crowds outside the station. Apparently using one of the mobile units acquired by the CBC for the occasion, he jumps down from the platform as the train picks up speed, running beside it as he breathlessly concludes his remarks. Similarly, Pelletier often uses the phrase “I can see,” and he calls attention to his vantage point a couple of times in a way that draws his listeners into sharing his gaze. Thus, for example, as the king inspects the guard of honour, Pelletier remarks that he is “almost out of my sight,” but then immediately mentions (for the second time) that some members of the crowd are using red periscopes, thereby suggesting that his view is still probably better than theirs. Later, as flags unfurl on the arrival of the royal couple, he verbally hopes “that they don’t block my view”—which is, of course, also the “view” of the network’s listeners. As experienced radio men, Pelletier and Wiklund also take full advantage of the aural impact of the occasion. Of the 23-minute broadcast, the announcers are silent for at least four, while bands play and crowds cheer. Moreover, they draw attention to these sounds, frequently repeating the titles of the tunes or the words of the crowd. Indeed, they had been given explicit instructions to “play up . . . public enthusiasm wherever it exists” (Murray to Odlum, 1939). As Dayan and Katz put it, “narration and cheering are so similar in function that one can be substituted for the other”; the narration is in fact merely “a more articulate form of cheering” (1992, p. 81). Generally, the music is martial and the cheers loud, thus providing a varied soundscape for the listeners, with marked contrasts between gently conversational description and the majestic music of regal pomp. This contrast, which might be read as contradictory, nevertheless serves the purpose of balancing the public/private dichotomy inherent in radio, and particularly in the airing of significant national events by a public service broadcaster (Johnson, 1983).

The royal tour by definition privileged officialdom, ceremony, and tradition. That the CBC announcers spent a good deal of time describing the presence and appearance of civic dignitaries and military troops is not surprising, for these were the principal participants in the ritualized interaction with their majesties. Interestingly, though, the commentary never speculated about the emotions, or indeed the conversation, of those who actually shook the hands of the royal couple or chatted with them. If identified at all, the dignitaries were ascribed functions rather than names. On the other hand, the announcers felt quite free to impute emotions to the ordinary people who were also present, struggling to get a glimpse of a waving hand from a passing car. Thus the crowds were sometimes “tense” or “a little awed,” other times “gay” and “jolly.” Insofar as the radio listeners were encouraged to identify emotionally with participants in the ceremony, then, it was with the crowds of onlookers. The crowds had to be watched too—Pelletier spots the white uniforms of the St. John’s Ambulance personnel ready to “do their duty” if necessary. The crowds were orderly—but it was also apparently necessary to mention that there were soldiers present, keeping them in their places at some distance from the centre of the square. As
was typical of the tour broadcasts, much was made of the presence of children on the scene (in this case leaning out the windows of a train on a nearby track). Because there is no reference to anyone who is not white and Canadian-born, it may be that no individuals or groups identifiable in this way were present. It is also possible that they were ignored in order to imply a “white settler” unity. The newspaper coverage of the day’s events, which of course allowed for more detail, did provide long lists of the names of those presented to their majesties, and it did mention that earlier in St. Catharines a “Ukrainian girls’ band” had been present, which “twanged busily on ‘O Canada’” while “the tune was thrown back from the deep and resonant throats of scores of amiably perspiring negroes” (Allen, 1939).

Throughout the broadcast the contrast between the special few at the centre of the event—most importantly their majesties, but also the prime minister, the mayor and his wife, the officials and dignitaries, and the military—is starkly evident. The CBC announcers clearly position themselves as being closer to this group than to the general public. Like the local officials, they are in a privileged physical position in terms of viewing the king and queen and their actions. Like the (male) dignitaries (except for the unnamed fellow in the cocked hat!), they are dressed soberly in dark suits with red armbands signifying their role. Like the local officials and the military guards, they are “on duty,” fulfilling their assigned task of enhancing the significance of the occasion. Clear messages of inclusion and exclusion are being sent here. As James Reaney put it in his poem about the stop in Stratford, Ontario, the day before: “The Mayor shook hands with their Majesties / And everyone presentable was presented / And those who weren’t have resented / It, and will / To their dying day. Everyone had almost a religious experience / When the King and Queen came to visit us / (I wonder what they felt!)” (Reaney, 1972, p. 53). The CBC announcers were not invited to the private dinners held so frequently at various stops, including at Niagara Falls, but neither were they jostling in the crowds. They were not part of the public but public servants, providing a service in making this special moment accessible to millions, scattered in their homes across the country. They were a part of the machinery of the symbolism of the occasion, the celebration of the monarchy, the empire, and the nation.

The serious yet fluid tone of the CBC network broadcast is largely congruent with the role Dayan and Katz ascribe to the broadcasters at media events, but the approach is more casual than reverential or “priestly,” as they would have it. As such, it was better suited both to the medium of radio and to the type of occasion—this was not a funeral or a papal mass or even a royal wedding. It was a moment for subjects to celebrate the physical presence of their rulers, sincerely, but not sombrely. There were some elements of celebrity and fandom in the crowd’s reaction to the sight of their majesties, but the announcers tended to subordinate or silence these moments, and they avoided all such displays themselves. The “three cheers for the king” was somewhat casual, but not unprecedented, and perhaps because the mayor led the cry, it was remarked upon. On the other hand, at one point the crowd is clearly heard in the background chanting “We want the king. We want the queen”—and is ignored by the announcer. Perhaps this came too close to lèse-majesté. There is virtually no indication of reflection, analysis, or doubt in the commentators’ remarks—the whole is played
absolutely straight, with even the slight verbal hesitations and corrections serving to enhance rather than detract from the weight of the commentary. It is good royal radio.

**The NBC live broadcast**

Only minutes after departing from the view of the CBC announcers, the royal train stopped just across the railway bridge at the little depot in Niagara Falls, New York, for the welcome from U.S. dignitaries. Secretary of State Cordell Hull stood in for the president. Mrs. Hull accompanied him, as did various officials from the state department and the British embassy, including ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay. At this point the announcing duties were taken over by NBC special events announcer George Hicks, although the CBC continued to record the material for use on its highlights show. A comparison between Hicks’ commentary and that of the CBC announcers is telling. There are many similarities in the presentations, including the use of vivid word pictures (the headlights of the train coming through “the black of the night,” the “dazzling arc lights” set in the roof of the station, the “wide red carpet spread over a scarlet carpet,” and of course the evocation of the majesty of the falls, “illuminated at night by changing coloured lights, thundering in the distance”). Hicks also maintains a respectful silence during the playing of the national anthems, focuses much of his description on the king’s review of the guard of honour, and calls attention to ambient noises (especially the sounds of the train). Hicks also identifies himself as an authoritative eyewitness, describing both near and distant space in great detail, and pointing out that the crowds of citizens who had come to see the arrival of the monarchs in the United States were in fact lined up outside the station, unable to see anything at all.

There are also both subtle and marked differences in the texts, however. One resulted from the significantly different institutional practices of the Canadian and American networks, whereby the Canadian announcers (as was also the BBC rule) were never identified by name on air (although their names had been previously published in press releases and regular CBC listeners would have recognized their voices). As they passed the microphone back and forth, Pelletier and Wiklund referred to one another as “our commentator.” In contrast, Hicks identifies himself by name in his second sentence. Beyond that, as might be expected, Hicks makes much of the presence of several crossed Stars and Stripes and Union Jacks, and throughout he emphasizes the fact that the king and queen are now in “a foreign country,” or more specifically “Niagara Falls, New York State, the United States of America.” While his tone is for the most part conversational, he is prone to many more “uhhs” than the Canadian commentators, and he allows real excitement to shine through as he suspensefully reports the progress of the train across the bridge and as the king first steps down. The greatest contrast in the presentations, however, lies in Hicks’ comments about the dignitaries on the station platform. Not only does he describe the clothing of the king and queen in greater detail, but he extends that description to the Hulls and the other officials (both the queen and Mrs. Hull, surprisingly, in powder blue ensembles; the men, including the king, all in “dark sack suits”), thereby suggesting an equivalency the CBC announcers avoided. Like the Canadians, he recounts fully the rounds of hand-shaking among the dignitaries, but he adds asides that change the
tone considerably. Thus, “Mrs. Hull shakes hands with the queen; the queen extends her hand and they both smile. Mrs. Hull does not curtsey; [uh] she greets the queen informally.” There is a hint of the resentment of exclusion in his voice as he continues: “It’s impossible to hear what the secretary of state is saying—we can see his mouth moving and his silvery white hair. And the queen is watching, smiling and listening attentively.”

More remarkably, however, Hicks offers his personal comments on the appearance and demeanour of the royal couple. As the king steps onto the platform, he reports: “The king looks as his pictures look, a slender man, a lean face, uh British looking, naturally [chuckle in voice], uh just a clean-cut looking young gentleman, of simple unaffected dignity.” At another moment he refers to the king’s “rather shy look” and near the end of the 15-minute recording, he returns to the subject before being interrupted by the need to report some action: “When the king stepped down it was almost a shock because this slender man in a business sack suit of formal cut came uh alone like uh a uh stripling stepping on....” About the queen, he is even more specific. “It's remarkable now that we can see them closely, to see that the queen is somewhat smaller than we had anticipated—uh in stature I mean—having seen her in formal attire and in queenly poses she seems more imposing but now with the gentlemen of the American committee and the British embassy she is a she is a—her stature is small; she uh appears extremely dainty.” In general, then, both the king and queen are “like people who are being introduced to other people for the first time. They greet them, and are cordial, and the Americans also are most cordial and friendly as they simply stand there on the red carpet chatting.” Again, then, Hicks parallels the royal couple and their hosts; they are not a special breed, but interesting guests from a foreign land pretty much like “us.”

Although the NBC segment is a third shorter than the one on the Canadian side, it contains far more about the physical appearance and behaviour of their majesties. Moreover, the brunt of these descriptions is to personalize them—they are different than they appear in pictures (i.e., more human); they behave just like other people do. Moreover, while the setting described may be formal, with red carpets and flags, the focus always returns to its informality, its everyday quality. This immediate and up-front emphasis on the “ordinariness” of this extraordinary couple, while not absent from the CBC coverage, nor from other commentaries about royalty stretching back to the days of Victoria, is in marked contrast to the more respectful, approbatory words of Bowman, Pelletier, and Wiklund. For the CBC announcers, the monarchs retained their mystique and mystery—their aura. As for Hicks, perhaps he protested too much, for the frequency of his references to the ordinary humanity of their majesties suggests that he too was well aware of their enormous ascribed status.

**The CBC re-broadcast**

At 11:15 that night, a 15-minute summary of the highlights of the day’s events was re-broadcast to the full CBC network from Toronto, spoken by Toronto announcer Ted Devlin. These re-broadcasts (“Summary Number 22,” 1939) operated on a number of levels. They were mainly intended for those not able to listen to the live broadcasts due to work schedules or other duties, although many seem to have listened to both
programs. Those who attended the event may have listened as well, thus re-experiencing the narrative of their presence. Most notable about these brief scripts is the heightened intensity of their rhetoric. Thus the script for June 7 begins with music and cheers and then Devlin's words:

It's Canada calling “Au Revoir”.
And it's the United States shouting “Welcome”.
There's a new kind of magic in the air tonight,
It's the sound of two nations cheering over
The garden peninsula from both sides of a mighty river.
Indian legends have come true—as a King and a Queen
Cross a frontier that is not a frontier, NIAGARA.
Thunderer of waters, resounding with a great noise—NIAGARA!
Magic link in The King's Highway, where 750,000
Canadians and Americans stand around nature's triumphal
Archway—the Niagara Rainbow, studded tonight with Union Jacks, with
Stars and Stripes, with handkerchiefs,
With hats, with everything.
It's Canada calling “Au Revoir”.
It's the United States calling “Welcome”.
(Music by studio orchestra: Three cheers for the Red White and Blue.)
Thus the writer invoked in a few lines the “magic” not only one of nature’s great wonders, Indian legends, kings and queens, but also the amity of Canadians and Americans sharing the continent. The prose becomes even more saccharine as the piece ends with a twist on Kipling's “Recessional”:

The tumult and the shouting dies.
The Captains and their King depart.
They have gone to a great new country to make great new friends! To unparalleled demonstrations between two great nations.
And we, who remain, send to her Majesty the Queen—a bouquet of royal memory—a floral tribute from all the people of our fair land—a bouquet of blossoms culled from the gardens of all her provinces. ... All these, in a setting of maple leaves, we offer to our Elizabeth of Canada, as a humble token of our undying loyalty and love—

I argued above that the CBC's live broadcast was characterized by a mixture of chattiness and reserve, splendour and silence. The American announcer's presentation offered a somewhat different blend, with greater emphasis on the common humanity of kings, queens, and crowds. The re-broadcast swings the pendulum back again. The “plummy, breathless purple prose” (Dempsey, 1976, p. 61) is so overwrought and at times so incomprehensible that one wonders how listeners could bear it. But in fact the re-broadcasts were very popular with listeners, and much praised in the letters the CBC received after the tour ended. Of 183 letters excerpted in the Corporation's files on the tour, 44, or almost one-quarter, specifically praised the re-broadcasts (“Extracts from Letters of Listeners,” 1939). In this particular case,
undoubtedly the evocation of the myths of the falls and of the friendly alliance between Canada and the United States spoke to meanings long engraved in the imaginations of English-Canadian listeners. The scripts were probably written by Ted Devlin, and, while there are no extant recordings, one suspects their tone was as breathless as their language. Although this script was undoubtedly prepared very hastily, given the unusual lateness of the live event, it is similar to the others that survive. The highlights programs in general had a much more theatrical tone than the live broadcasts, and it is relevant to point out that Devlin had been an active member of the Ottawa Drama League in the 1930s before moving to Toronto, and that he had also performed in at least one movie (Devlin, 1998). General-Manager Murray was not averse to this approach either, and he agreed that some parts of the tour coverage did call for “more of an acting job requiring special artistic and theatre sensibilities” (Murray to Bushnell, 1939, April 14).

Despite the variations in tone, however, both of the CBC examples demonstrate the Corporation’s general approach to this media event: simultaneously serious and celebratory, and grounded in assumptions of loyalty and consensus. While the re-broadcast explicitly evokes the tour’s messages of national and imperial (and continental) hope and unity, at the live event the message was more subtly implied through devices establishing authority and confirming the existing social order. The re-broadcast script also puts the spotlight more firmly on Queen Elizabeth, perhaps because the schedule on June 7 had included the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Way (see Coutu, 2002). By that stage in the tour it was also clear that she was its star, and perhaps we see here early stirrings of the celebrity mystique that was to surround this ordinary/extraordinary woman until her death in 2002 (Bousfield & Toffoli, 1989). The contrast with the NBC commentary is not stark, but it is significant. Although Hicks was announcing an event that was a purely formal occasion, a meeting of dignitaries from three nations at a border crossing, he nevertheless went out of his way to stress the ordinariness of the participants, their humanity, their fundamental equality. The Canadian announcers described what they saw, or believed they saw; the American opined about it. Similarly, while the CBC presenters barely mentioned the visit to the falls because that was not their task at the railway station, Hicks opened with the magnificent natural elements of the river and falls to locate the story for his listeners, and of course the re-broadcast, designed to ascribe meanings, made the mythology of the falls and the “frontier that is not a frontier” central.

Conclusion

Halfway through the tour, the Toronto weekly Saturday Night editorialized that the CBC Radio coverage had facilitated a “new and intimate relationship” between “our Sovereign Lord the King and the people of the British Empire.” It went on: “Though countless thousands of Canadians have been witnessing their [majesties'] public appearances, an incalculably greater number have been listening to their voices and visualizing their actions as seen through the eyes of the broadcasters; and for this vast ‘unseen’ audience the contact has been far more intimate than was ever possible through photography and the printed word” (“Radio and Royalty,” 1939). Like the CBC broadcasters themselves, the magazine celebrated the capacity of this new, inti-
mate medium to re-affirm national and imperial social cohesion. The reporting on the passage at Niagara Falls extended the mantle of unity to include the third great English-speaking nation, with which Canada shared a continent full of natural and man-made wonders.

But the story is a bit more complicated than that. As I have demonstrated, the broadcasters’ address was not always intimate; sometimes it was theatrical and dramatic, as befitting traditional royal ceremonial. Always, however, it was sincere, sympathetic, “warm and genuine,” and recognized as such (“Extracts from Letters of Listeners,” 1939, p. 10). Much of this confirms Dayan and Katz’s general view of the function of media events in modern societies, despite the differences between radio and television as broadcast media. Nevertheless, it is also clear that, however subconsciously, the broadcasters described—and thereby helped construct—a hierarchical society in which those in the centre spoke for everyone else. In 1939 the fledgling CBC quite openly sought a privileged position for itself as a North American public service broadcaster, not driven by commerce like the private stations but by the mission to educate, inform, and entertain the whole nation. Rituals are subjunctive; they are about what “ought to be” (Cottle, 2006). The CBC broadcasters’ vision of what ought to be was a world in which power remained in the hands of the appropriate authorities, and where good order was maintained by institutions like their own. This study demonstrates, I would argue, that Nick Couldry is correct when he states that media rituals “are at least as much about confirming categories and divisions as they are about establishing social unity.” He wrote: “The media’s ritual categories are socially divisive, not because they are understood directly in those terms (if they were, they would be less effective), but because they entrench a naturalised division of the world into two, which in turn helps legitimate society’s unequal distribution of its symbolic resources” (Couldry, 2003, p. 141; emphasis in original). The live radio broadcasts may have generally privileged intimacy over the stentorian voice of authority, but they did not open up any space for reflection or disagreement. By their skilful use of the most powerful new medium of modernity, the CBC’s announcers re-affirmed the status quo and helped construct and legitimate the authority of the neophyte public broadcaster.

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Notes

1. There was also newsreel coverage shown in cinemas, some of which is available on the websites of British Pathé and Universal and on YouTube, and a 90-minute documentary film The Royal Visit, produced by the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, which was not released until after World War II had begun (available for purchase from the NFB/ONF). Some excerpts of the CBC’s tour broadcasts (unfortunately not including those (CBC, 1939) studied here) are available on the CBC’s Digital Archives website.

2. For the most recent British and American scholarship on the 1939 visit to the United States see Bell (2002), Leventhal (2000), and McCulloch (2007/8). Beyond the works cited above on the CBC, there
3. My focus will be on the texts of the broadcast journalists; owing to lack of surviving sources, any comments on audience reception would be almost entirely speculative. For brief remarks on the main evidence of listener reaction to the tour, extracts from letters to the CBC, see Vipond, 2007, pp. 345-346. As might be expected given the purpose of the letters (to request a copy of the poem read as the king and queen left Halifax), the correspondents were unanimously enthusiastic about the CBC’s coverage. Their only complaint was that the CBC did not always provide such high-quality programming. Those indifferent to or negative about the tour broadcasts (or the tour) are not present in this document (See “Extracts from Letters of Listeners,” 1939).

4. There exists an even larger literature that more generally discusses “rituals,” “civic rituals,” “spectacle,” and “performance,” but the complex debate about the meaning and relevance of these terms is not central to my point here, so I have opted to utilize the more catch-all term “ceremony” that Dayan and Katz prefer. I have nevertheless found useful much of the literature on civic rituals in particular, some of which will be referenced below.

5. The listener letters the CBC received very frequently mentioned that family and friends had listened to the broadcasts together, and many also spoke of imagining themselves as part of an audience of “countless thousands” (“Extracts from Letters of Listeners,” 1939, p. 21).

6. Susan Douglas (1999) quotes scholars who argue that listening is more powerful than looking because it envelops and involves us; it pulls us in, whether we want it to or not, while the gaze distances and separates us from the world around us.

7. Rosalind Brunt (1996, p. 143) points out in her analysis of newsreel coverage of the monarchy that Queen Elizabeth seemed to be very conscious of the lenses focused on her. Brunt quotes Beatrice Webb’s astute remark that the queen “blows kisses to admiring Yankees in New York but looks the perfect dignified aristocrat in London.”

8. Newsreels of the royals and their major activities were regularly shown in cinemas in both Canada and the United States in the 1930s, as were popular Hollywood films about the private lives of past kings and queens, in which “the charisma of the stars and the charisma of the monarchs commingled” (Richards, 2007, p. 274).

9. Although the CBC team apparently did not at first realize the importance of this event, once alerted by calls and letters from the listening public, it had the resources to quickly add it to the schedule and to exploit it brilliantly.

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