Voices-cast: a report on the new audiosphere of podcasting with specific insights for public broadcasting

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Abstract

Digitisation and the ready downloading and distribution of audio files on the internet have transformed contemporary audio media. Podcasting, which emerged with unexpected rapidity in 2005, has achieved wide popularity due to two of its characteristics: time-shifting and portability. Another feature of podcasting – to date less a subject of critical reflection – is the central role played by the voice and pre existing forms of voice radio. Drawing on examples and links with early radio and some of its more imaginative forms, this paper theorizes the podcast phenomenon as an extension of already existing speech radio – a boon in particular to public broadcasting radios' rich reservoir of programs and cultural and democratic mission. The discussion also engages with this new sphere for the transport, communication and performance of voices of all kinds, including amateur voices (citizens media) and the voices of the dead. The paper asks: what resonances can we detect in podcasting today from radio's past, and what might this new pod-ecology offer listeners in the future? Invoking historian, John Durham Peters discussion of the merits of dissemination and dialogue, and critical theorist Bertolt Brecht's disappointment with "one way" broadcast radio in the 1930s, a genealogy of the form is considered drawing on radio's past dreamings of "eros and democracy". The significance of this new distribution and acousmatic presence is discussed in the context of citizen media, with particular focus on public broadcasting and the innovations and developments forged by these major institutions internationally. The paper draws on the author's current research into podcasting, especially in relation to its recent and massive uptake by public service radios, which the author argues may be constituting a revitalising of the public radio voice.

Keywords

Podcasting, radio, public broadcasting, citizens media, broadcast radio, radio histories, public broadcasting radio, radio and innovation, listening and communication, auditory culture, radio cultures

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Contexting the rise of podcasting

The word "podcasting", a fusion of "broadcasting" and "iPod", began to be used three years after Apple's launch of the iPod in 2001. An early reference to the new form of audio distribution was made by journalist Ben Hammersley (2004). Remarking that Apple's iPod and other MP3 players were already "in many pockets", and that weblogging had become "an established part of the internet", Hammersley observed that these factors, combined with the availability of free or cheap audio production software, created "all the ingredients' for "a new boom in amateur radio." His attempt to name this new form was tentative, but "what to call it?" he asked, "Audioblogging? Podcasting? GuerillaMedia?" (Hammersley, 2004). Later in that year, Doc Searls posted a blog titled 'DIY radio with PODcasting', anticipating a new form of radio "where we choose what we want to hear" (in Gilmour, 2006, p. xiii).

The contrast between these tentative mentions of a possible audio distribution platform in 2004 and the actuality of podcasting only a year later, is remarkable. Even more startling is the exponential growth and apparent interest in podcasting, in the space of less than a year. Dan Gilmour mentions that a Google search he did for 'podcasts' in September 2004 yielded only 24 hits, whereas one year later that same search elicited over 100 million hits (Gilmour, 2006, pp. xiii-xiv). And the neologism "podcast", uncertainly floated at the beginning of 2004, had moved into such widespread use that by August 2005 the Oxford English American Dictionary included it, making it their word of the year (S. Miles in Berry, 2006, p. 104).[1]

So what is podcasting? Most of you will be familiar with the term as you subscribe to yet another radio program, or have manually downloaded a radio show or audio onto your ipod,

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[1] In S. Miles, 'Podcast Makes the Dictionary', the term was defined as "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the internet for downloading to a personal audio player", although this is not quite accurate: the podcast can now be listened to straight off the computer, or on any mobile device storing files such as mp3s.

computer, or third generation mobile phone. More pertinent to my discussion is the podcast's relationship and its possible significance in regard to that old media 'broadcast' form, the radio. If in such a short interval of time podcasting has become a household word, might we agree with our earlier podcasting commentators for example, that podcasting's prime significance appears to lie in its potential to create "a new era of amateur radio" or "citizens radio"? (Gilmour, 2006, pp xiii-xiv).

While there has been a growing discussion along these lines, and at least anecdotally we might cite the fact that amateur podcasts are making up a substantial portion of the total podcasts available, we are in danger of missing something very important if we only stress podcasting as an internet distributed citizen's radio, or new independent model for DIY radio, or even an audio web log phenomenon again driven by the citizen voice. In this paper I want to touch on another aspect of podcasting and this is in its relationship to public service media – especially its massive uptake, evolution and expansion via institutional outlets of public service broadcasting since 2004.

In less than four years the adoption of this new internet hosted, audio production and distribution platform has resulted in the marked transformation of much of public service broadcast radio, at least in terms of when and how we access and listen to it. I'd argue this transformation has been greater than for commercial or community radio. From the evidence, it appears commercial radio has not adopted the format anywhere near so enthusiastically as the large public service broadcasters (PSBs). This is because, for the most part, podcasting appears to favour old forms of 'block programming', even the talk-driven high production values programming still a characteristic – although not by any means the only offering – of much public broadcasting radio.[2] For at least thirty years, commercial radio organizations have relied much more on 'flow', especially music programming, or hosted talk formats and talkback (Hendy, 2000). These formats make it difficult and even potentially unviable to podcast for a number of reasons. In terms of establishing any history of podcasting thus far too – and this will only be a brief sketch of some Anglophone developments – we need to take

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[2] Radio Four of the BBC is an example. It now offers a majority of its programs, cultural and informational, for podcast (alhough for a limited time only) or as streamed content on its i-player. The BBC World Service, distinguished by a mix of block and flow talk programming has a documentary archive available for download anywhere in the world. At http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/podcasts/docarchive/ And ABC stations closer to their commercial talk counterparts even fragment flow programming into podcast packages for easy and targeted download.

into account these international PSB developments as much as the exploding amateur universe of podcasting. This is especially important if we are to begin to explore the potential impact and significance of podcasting within media culture into the future, and in terms of podcasting's particular effects on PSB media organizations, including the extension and proliferation of its particular voices into diverse (and now global) public spheres.

I will briefly chart two intersecting genealogies for podcasting in its relationship with radio. These two intersecting vectors for development allow us to see how podcasting may be much more than: 1) just another distribution dissemination platform – one way, and as some typify it, passive – for already existing audio programming, and therefore, simply old radio available on demand or; 2) an idea of a more democratic communication never realized through 'old' radio because of its capture by 'paternal' institutions, dictators, state regulation, corporate/commercial interests etc. In this last reading, it is primarily the independent internet radios and *prosumer* podasting which are deemed to allow dialogic communications to occur, with opportunities for renewal of 'old radio' seen to come from new ideas generated by this unregulated influx of new voices entering the radioscape.

We might recall here how Bertolt Brecht once imagined the radio: how it might function democratically rather than *encratically* (serving power in the form of the state or commerce). In his oft cited article 'The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication' (1932, in Strauss & Mandl, 1993, pp15 – 17),[3] Brecht stressed what he saw as the loss inherent in broadcasting *dissemination*; for Brecht and the inheritors of this reading, the one to many model meant a reduction in radio communications' potential – in essence a loss in radio's ability to be a two-way civic and democratising force. As Brecht castigated and advised:

> [R]adio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out…Change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life...That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him (Brecht in Strauss & Mandl).

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[3] Originally published as 'Der Rundfunk als kommunikationsapparat' in Blattaer der Hessischen Landestheaters, Darmstadt, No 16, 1932.

Brecht's next words are uncanny today in an environment where UGC (User Generated Content) is the buzzword of the moment: "[R]adio should step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers" (Brecht, Strauss & Mandl, 1993, p 15). In this formulation, like the latest excited exponents of citizen media, Brecht presumes the dialogic two-way flow to be inherently more democratic a communication apparatus than with the one-to-many version, characteristic of traditional radio and television broadcasting. This view, I contend, is far too limiting a model, contributing to a substantial under appreciation of the public broadcasting usage, indeed active development of podcast audio programming as part of its public broadcasting mission and wider *dialogue* with its audiences.

Podcasting: returning to early vectors

This rapid emergence of a new type of audio production, programming, distribution and reception technology – in effect a new kind of radio – has been facilitated by a series of technological and marketing innovations: compressed audio files such as mp3s, the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) file format allowing computer users to subscribe automatically to podcasts of their choice, and a variety of simple to use other podcasting creation and subscription softwares (such as the I-podder).[4] By June 2005 Apple had also added a podcasting feature to its popular iTunes software, at the same time making over 3,000 podcasts available for no cost. In just two days in that month Apple declared over one million subscriptions to podcasts via iTunes (Apple press releases June 2005, in Crofts et al, 2005, pp 2-3).

The appeal of podcasting already transcends the consumption of audio files by computer users: iTunes promoted *prosumers* allowing them to easily create and publish their own podcasts. This, as others have argued, marked the beginning of true DIY radio even as streamed internet radio was already operational, but catering less to amateurs due to increased levels of complication and greater needs for establishment funding. Capitalising on its marketing momentum – its iPod brand name had, after all, been absorbed into the generic name of this new medium – Apple could now trumpet podcasting as "the next generation of radio" (Apple 2005 in Crofts et al, 2005, p 3).

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[4] Crofts et al., 2005 provide an account of these developments, pp. 2-3.

Perhaps more so than other countries USA listeners, disaffected with much of commercial radio's conservative programming and "plague" of advertising (Crofts et al, 2005),[5] were now able to listen to a proliferation of often amateur voices in niche-oriented podcasts. Or they too could join the ranks of independent speakers creating their own podcasts "from back rooms, sheds and even cars…" (Dearman & Galloway, 2005, p. 536).[6] Podcasts such as the now long running "The Dawn and Drew Show!" started at this time, featuring the shenanigans of "two self-described ex-gutter punks who podcast from a 19th century dairy farm in southeast Wisconsin and talk raunchy about love, sex and even farm animals" (Homepage, Miceli & Domkus). While listening to some of their own uncensored highlights handpicked from their last 100 programs, Dawn reflected; "Who'd have thought anyone would listen?" "Take this Big Brother! I don't need you. I don't need your fucking contracts. I've got my own radio show!"

Here we see much of the early excitement surrounding amateur podcasting in its challenge to traditional communication and media channels. This podcasting, touted as being about "reclaiming the radio", "refreshing the radio" (J. Twist in Berry, 2006, pp 4-5), could claim to bypass the hierarchical gate-keeping role of mass media. Here many could see a horizontal media form – some invoke the term rhizomatic – where consumers are producers and engage in ongoing conversations with other prosumers. Journalist Stephen Baker observed in the middle of 2005 that "the heart of the podcasting movement" was "in the world of blogs, those millions of personal Web pages that have become a global sensation" (Baker in Crofts et al, 2005, p 2). The broader social context of podcasting as we can see here should then be considered in any history of podcasting's development. Technological innovation or the role of a large and influential organizations like Apple is crucial, but so too is this rhizomatic 'links' culture helping to extend the podcast through space and time.

We might invoke Brecht's essay again from 1932 to reflect on this 'radio reborn'. What sort of radio is it? And does it remind us of those early unregulated crystal set days? Drew sounded to me just like the early amateur radio ham operator (and the quality of the 'transmission' is almost as bad) when he "IDed" their show's very first podcast with the

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[5] Crofts et al. refer here to the appeal of podcasting for listeners keen to escape "the advertising that plagues traditional radio broadcasting" (p 5).

[6] Dearman and Galloway also cite Timothy McNulty, who refers to "roadcasting" as another form of podcasting, allowing "music sharing in and between cars" (p 544n10).

words "So, this is September 23. It's 10.19pm, Broadcas…[slip of the tongue] podcasting from Allington, Wisconsin" (Ex webarchive, Miceli & Domkus).

Along with Brecht (who was responding to the growing demagoguery of prewar Germany) the earliest utopian visions of radio embodied in amateur radio and 'the listener-in' experience appeared to advocate active production/participation by individuals and an anarchic unregulated dialogic communication. Sabine Breitsameter described this early radio experience: "Every night, hundreds or radio amateurs would assemble in the ethers. Call and answer occurred on the same frequency – by the dozens, simultaneously. The whole thing was like a modern day Internet chat scenario, but you could hear every bit of it" (Breitsameter, 2007, p 61).

These earlier voices, I'd argue, sympathetically vibrate, resounding in the new DIY podcasting sphere of enthusiastic amateurs, geeks and dabblers who have become for all intents and purposes their own radio stations, equipped to produce their own small (and in some cases extremely large and profitable) 'radio' aggregation networks and shows through RSS, ipod and the web's implicit link culture.[7] The media artist, Richard Kriesche appeared prophetic in 1988 when he talked of the new emergent "radio man" in his performance "Radiozeit":

> the electric man no longer listens to the radio – he himself is radio…he creates around himself the postmodern aura of an omnipresence. His exterior is radiant…[and] his interior is embedded in the electronic community of the data background (Grundmann, 2007, p 215).

We hear this line through too, in much of the now familiar and frankly utopian talk generated around podcasting, blogging and online citizen journalism and other emergent participatory media forms centred around this release of voices and *presence* into everyday life. The viral or rhizomatic libertarian potential of this activity is argued as a contribution to what Pierre

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[7] This occurs via Web 2.0 convergence and links, email, and internet "favourites" sites like Delicious, allowing individual favourites to be seen by many and cross-referenced. Hugely successful podcasters like Adam Curry appear to be building small empires of podcasting in this way. His Daily Source Code show, one of many hosted by his company Pod Show Inc., was cited as averaging more than 1 million downloads a month in December 2005. (Martin Miller, 2006) and in The Economist, 'Podcasting Will Change Radio, Not Kill It' (April 22nd, 2006, p. 12), it was suggested that by 2006 he had "several million listeners".

Levy has called "collective intelligence" (Levy, 1994 and Rheingold, 2008). It is worth noting how the so-called gatekeepers of media are also encouraging this culture: for instance the ABC is supporting the development of an innovative social networking project, *Pool.*[8]

It is noteworthy that *radio as a medium* was not being rejected by the new DIYers. As pioneer and podcasting entrepreneur Adam Curry (previously well known as an MTV Veejay) declared: "Using the theatre of the mind, using sound as art – this is something we've forgotten how to do in radio" (cited by D. Terdiman in Dearman & Galloway, 2005, p 540).[9] Neither is it surprising that Apple, while marketing podcasting and iTunes, should use terms such as "Radio Reborn" as it tried to capture the appeal of the new format (Apple Press release 2005 cited in Crofts et al, 2005, p3).

We might also understand then another trajectory back to broadcast radio in this renewed call to creativity in audio programs (as Curry's), a harking back to the golden age of institutional and network radio, relegated to the realm of nostalgia and amnesia with the arrival of television in the 1950s, at least in the US (see Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002 and Douglas, 1999).[10] The new podcasters in America could also cite the loss of their own more edgy non conformist DJing tradition (originating in the pirate radios of the 1960s), the Wolfman Jacks now increasingly discarded by conservative networks who feared listeners becoming too

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[8] Numerous examples exist of these kinds of institutions creating space for and actively encouraging audio contributions from their publics. ABC's Pool is dedicated to a range of these possibilities and RN's Street Stories project was another example. See http://www.pool.org.au/ The BBC has a number of initiatives to incorporate young prosumers too in news, for eg., 'News School Report' enabling children in UK schools the chance to make audio, video and text news stories, with the help and feedback from professionals. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/school_report/default.stm at the BBC.

[9] See Daniel Terdiman, "Podcasts: New Twist on Net audio", Wired News, 8 October 2004. Curry's current and popular podcast site, Daily Source Code gives us a summary of what his podcasts are all about: "The challenge to mainstream media -- and the voice of independent media -- starts here. Podfather Adam Curry scours the globe for the hottest new mashups, podcast highlights, and podsafe music". (Curry, 2008) At http://www.dailysourcecode.com/)

[10] This picture is not entirely applicable in the U.K and much of Northern and Western Europe where public service radio continued to disseminate and produce rich content in the form of comedy, drama, serials, documentaries and features. And this continues in the contemporary context.

distracted to attend their advertising content or station jingles[11]. In these equally sympathetic vibrations, John Durham Peters extended disquisition on broadcasting and communication (1999) provides other routes and clues for me to explore, especially in the light of the Brechtian legacy against dissemination media, and any assessment of broadcasting per se as a deficient form of democratic communication. As Peters reminds us in his provocative history of the idea of communication, the first radio communication (two way), as with pirate and golden age radio podcasting precursors, should alert us to desires beyond that of democratic communication. As he writes, "democracy and eros remain the twin frames for the popular reception of each new medium" (1999, p 224).

In its unruly amateur guise, podcasting undoubtedly does offer new hope for some of these voices, through sidestepping the gatekeepers and building on (multiplying) communities of like-minded listeners. Sometimes it can even surprise the podcasters how far their voices can actually be carried. Dawn and Drew podcasting from their "goulash of hotness" in "Studio B Studio Barn" as they describe it, commented on the occasion of their 100th show: "Yeah, there are not many shows who have reached 100 and we've come onto you 100 times." Referencing themselves in their program as being in the 'Top 10" on Podcast Alley,[12] this pair can be heard to speak with increasing confidence as they witness their niche audience growing beyond the friends and family it presumably started with. Dawn and Drew had uploaded nearly 900 programs as podcasts by mid 2009, starting from their opening episodes recorded with little more than a cheap laptop, Garage Band software and a poor sounding internal microphone. Dawn in particular, playing with the sense of a private space revealed (on exhibition) to the listener's imagination through acousmatic sound (private voice to private ear), enjoys the salacious play made possible by this kind of radio persona invisible to the eye. Performing herself – simulating or performing real sex or recounting stories we cannot be sure are actual – her voice can be recognised as being both a marker of an identity and a mask (masque) for it. Both a sense of authenticity and trickery through performed play (without

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[11] How much of this kind of performance is actually out there in amateur versions of podcasting, or further mutating, is hard to ascertain at this stage, and unfortunately remains beyond the limits of this paper. What we can say is that the heavily formatted and syndicated radio dominant in the U.S for many years had become so stultifying that any real individual creativity or spontaneity was now virtually impossible (Hendy, 2000).

[12] Dawn and Drew make this claim in their 100th show. They were not listed in the Top 10 when this paper was being written, but enthusiastic bloggers post comments like: "The most natural down to earth podcasters I have ever heard", or "There will never be any better in my lifetime." Accessed

http://www.podcastalley.com/podcast_details.php?pod_id=195 (July 27, 2008).

vision, therefore acousmatic) enter these reality home studio podcasts, although one might complain of an excess of self-indulgence or narcissism. One of the explanations for the show's popularity may also lie here, in the show's slippage between professional and amateur, reality and artifice, matched with the 'characters' pronounced ordinariness – heard in their apparently 'unproduced' voices and in the equally unscripted feel of their presentation.

But perhaps we can also appreciate the losses and missed connections here in the tangled thicket of voices increasingly on permanent display, voices unable to sound beyond tiny niche markets? Jean-Luc Nancy (who has written much on the idea of community) refers to voices as possessing weight. He asserts the voice "is not a thing", but rather, "the means by which something-someone-takes distance from the self and lets that distance resonate" (Nancy, 1993, p 20). In the wake of podcasting, what we can frequently hear is an almost delirious abundance of voices in the crowd, a type of glossolalia with many of these unable to extend themselves efficiently, or find a resonance sufficient to make themselves heard beyond their own small niche communities. These are voices unable to bridge the gap of distance (the potential vacuum) that threatens, no matter how persuasive our beliefs in connectivity and interactivity might be. These are voices that speak to anyone – or no one – voices in Babel, leaving us with little more than a half-tuned twitter to decipher. And so often they miss out on becoming "favourites" in this exploded media environment which counts successes increasingly in "hits" and through the new aggregating possibilities enabled by social networking and the technologies and corporations which are making this phenomenon almost banal.

Another significant vector for podcasting: public service radio

Podcasting has had a meteoric rise, but this has been the result of much more than the hordes of amateurs (and businesses and other organizations) now taking up the challenge to create their own podcasts based on surprisingly familiar radio formats. As already argued, it is a phenomenon to be considered beyond the domain of conducive technologies, citizen media "dialogue", the desire to self promote, put oneself on display or hopes of internet geek culture. The explosion in use and awareness of podcasting traced to the middle of 2005 must be considered in relation to the participation and innovations developed by some of the major broadcasting institutions internationally, particularly the large public broadcasters and their big platform institutional initiatives. They grasped quite early on the potential of this new aggregate of technologies, especially in relation to their brief to provide as much quality content as possible to the widest public with no or insignificant cost to the citizen and consumer (Scannell, 2004 and Madsen, 2007).

While reporting favourably on the influx of thousands of different amateur podcast shows "from gardening programs, film and TV review programs, shows about motherhood, wine, religion and technology – with the overwhelming majority of them made by ordinary people in their own homes" (Waters, 2005), the BBC set about launching its own podcasting trials in early 2004. What's more, the BBC and equivalent public broadcasters elsewhere were hearing from their listeners who were demanding the obvious. Here's what one listener to ABC's ideas and talk network had to say in October 2004:

> I'm 20 years old, interested in social issues, carry an iPod and mobile phone. I'm techno savvy. Why can't I listen to AM radio anymore? Neither of the devices I carry with me whilst I'm on the go have an AM receiver. How do you expect me to listen to Radio National if the hardware is not being manufactured? Why don't you Podcast Radio National shows? (Carslisle, 2004).[13]

The BBC was the first of the PSBs to trial podcasting, and their initiative quickly reaped rewards extending the audience for what then Controller of Radio and Music interactive would call "one of our most challenging programmes", the *Radio 4* history programme, *In Our Time* presented by Melvyn Bragg. (Nelson.)[14] The podcast went on to become the public broadcaster's "most popular podcast", averaging "30,000 download requests a week" in 2005 (Entertainment, TV and Radio, 2005). According to *BBC News*: "[O]verall, the BBC had more than 100,000 download requests each week in July of 2005" (Ibid).

What the BBC and others had picked up in this early stage of the invention of a new audiosphere (or we might call it, to recall Gaston Bachelard (1951), a new "logosphere" of words in motion) was that podcasting might signal not only the demand for new types of programming – some of it currently not on offer from the mainstream – but also an "appetite for new ways of listening" (Nelson Op cit), and inadvertently, new ways of composing one's listening fare. This certainly was the case at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in radio, where traditional offerings in the form of the national cultural and talk network

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[13] An email from a listener to the ABC sent after a program about podcasting, 'Music of the Blogospheres' was broadcast on ABC Radio National's Background Briefing, October 2004.

[14] Radio 4 is a loose equivalent to ABC's major national cultural talk radio network, Radio National (RN), although the audience numbers for Radio 4 have been consistently much greater than RNs, reaching 12% of available listeners in its breakfast current affairs slot (Nelson 2004).

(RN), still existed only on AM mono or on inferior quality streaming on the internet, thereby seriously limiting audience expansion, especially younger audiences who were barely aware of the AM band. In an internal paper titled '"PODCAST OR PERISH": Podcasting on Radio National" (Carlisle, 2004), Wendy Carlisle outlined why RN should adopt a podcasting trial of its own. She saw RN becoming "marginalised by technological advances and changes in audience behaviour and demands" (Carlisle). While RN audiences had for many years remained static and small in comparison to commercial FM in particular, Carlisle reported that by December 2004 there were "over 450 thousand on-line accesses to RN web pages every week. That figure has grown by between thirty and fifty percent each year since 2000", and she went on, adding; "Ten percent of these accesses result in an audio download (either live streaming or on demand) and it's estimated that when RN completes its full roll out of windows across all programs, that figure could grow to 90,000 audio hits each week" (Carlisle 2005). The rest is now history as RN's 2006 podcasting trials became the standard operating procedure for the network (and others like it around the world), allowing listeners to choose their own listening schedules (in effect to "time shift"), or to discover – perhaps for the first time – programs they never knew existed because of accessibility problems, lack of promotion by the network and so forth.[15]

This early phase of podcasting for the large PSBs has not so much been about creating new types of program then, although this has the potential to become more prevalent in the next phase of podcasting along with audio driven online content, but rather about podcasting as a form of time shifting or creating programs as downloadable archives to be listened to in whatever time sequence the listener chooses. Indeed, much of the extraordinary popularity of podcasting (especially to public broadcasters) may be attributed to this activating, rather than passive time-shifting, capacity. Listeners are enabled to download and store rich audio content to be listened to whenever – and in whichever sequence – they choose. This is potentially an empowering process, allowing prosumers to programme their own listening experience. Podcasting thus operates here in a manner contrary to the principle of sequence or flow, which Raymond Williams identified as "the defining characteristic of broadcasting" (Williams, 1974, p 86). For Williams, the "planned flow" of programming introduced by radio broadcasting, was a formal departure from all previous communications systems, in which "the essential items were discrete" (Ibid, pp86 – 87).

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[15] RN has most recently revealed its successes with podcasting (see Simons, 2008).

Has podcasting returned audio communication to something like a pre-broadcasting condition – assembling audio items as "discrete" and separated from any sense of sequenced flow? I take a different view to that of Williams. In the image of podcasting as we see it evolving today, and as a function of the larger broadcasting matrix embodied for example in the expanded global public service broadcasting model – which also produces itself as a vast reservoir of possible connections or germinations – we might conjure up instead the image of the seed pod, with broadcasting (from its agricultural usage, the throwing of seed) as providing the ongoing potential for dissemination of programs "in suspension" (Bachelard). This is a broadcasting that need not be defined *only* in terms of real-time flows. Rather we could imagine, in keeping with this image of the seed pod, that podcasting is the continuing desire for the potential dissemination of programs, and these may be typified as both in movement (in real time) and in suspension (in a future time). Hundreds, perhaps thousands of broadcasts await a 'fertile' connection and this is attempted through the possibility for download, only established in actuality through a real time listening: the coupling of 'seed' and ear, the possibility for germination, activation.

Public Service Broadcasting as an expanded gift culture through the pod

In this way we might also argue that podcasting is being harnessed to extend PSB institutions' already rich audio diffusions.[16] Podcasting on the one hand is an atomized affair involving a host of individual podcasters. They rise above the babble, come to prominence or not. But it is also a form within a surprisingly short time-span that is transforming public service broadcasting. Perhaps more than Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB radio), podcasting appears most likely to offer renewed opportunities for this huge sphere of media, either as a way to revitalise existing services directed towards time poor but hungry-for-content listeners, or opening up new listeners to these services, especially avid for their content-rich forms unavailable on most mainstream commercial radio or through other kinds of services.

The major public service broadcasters had no or little podcasting in 2005 as we have seen, but today millions of hours weekly are podcasts, with increasing numbers of downloads recorded and new subscribers. American National Public Radio (NPR) launched its first podcasts on August 31, 2005 after having "received e-mail requests from listeners for months", (according to blogger Mark Glaser). "The term 'podcast' was one of the most searched terms on NPR.org", Glaser noted during this early period, and it took only six days after launch for NPR's "Story of the Day" podcast to reach the No. 1 spot on iTunes for most downloaded

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[16] I draw here on the work on "gift cultures" of Lewis Hyde. (1983)

podcast. On Nov. 21, NPR's podcasts held down 11 spots on the iTunes Top 100, more than any other media outlet (see Glaser, 2005).

The BBC and large cultural PSBs like it are more than media outlets in this reenergized dissemination model; through this convergent technology they become searchable libraries, not only of data and words, but of sound, experiences and voices. Podcasting is not something other to broadcasting then, rather it remains productively dependent on its initial diffusion, and this is the gift ecology already created by broadcasting in its formative years *as dissemination*.

Using the metaphor of the pod once more (as a collection of seeds encased in some protective yet permeable form, and to be set free from the parent as a gift – of life) we might say that podcasting here continues the gift culture tradition already established, but threatened, of public broadcast dissemination. This has been to distribute freely to all, no matter what the waste, for the common good (Scannell, 2004).[17] It may be quite possible that program pods containing these voices in suspension disperse like so many seeds (through links, RSS feeds and downloads) finding a place to settle or open their full contents supported by a new and richer ecology of revitalised broadcast audio and radio talk. They can offer public service broadcasting listeners in particular, beyond the boundaries of nation states and niche markets, much greater accessibility to their unique rich mix programming ecology, designed to be scattered to all without any desire for an immediate return.[18]

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[17] See Paddy Scannell, "Love and Communication: A Review essay", in Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture, Vol 1, 1, p 102, p 100. I have been greatly inspired by this essay and its dialogue with Peters's book (1999).

[18] In his essay (2004), Scannell responds to, even sounds out the greater depth contained in John Durham Peters' book, Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication. Scannell appreciates Peters' rich and original discussion of broadcasting in the biblical parable of the sower (the broadcast of seed thrown out freely and indiscriminately – the origin of the word broadcasting is agricultural) in connection with the democratic thrust inherent in all broadcasting. Peters writes: "Clearly there is nothing ethically deficient about broadcasting as a one way flow" (1999, p 59). For Scannell, however, it is only in its public broadcasting aspect that broadcasting might be truly regarded as "ethical": it does not matter, argues Scannell, that it present "efficient communication" or be "scandalously uneconomic" (Scannell, p 99). As The Sower depicted inside Broadcasting House (Eric Gill's often overlooked sculpture, BBC London) public broadcasting "gives without any expectation of a return" (Ibid p 97).

And if recognised within the gift culture of a cultural commons[19] (rather than as a deficient democratic one way communication), podcasting has the potential to revitalise public broadcasting and the still desired public sphere in a time of frequently unreliable babble where voices speak more to their own kind than a broad and diverse public. Public broadcasters and other respected cultural and educational institutions are likely to remain key players here if this gift capacity is not underestimated. This is also because of their larger resources, already substantial archives (of voices and visions) to draw upon, obvious aggregating power as institutions and their still justified historical claims to deliver quality and independence of thought.

There is also the possibility to reconsider those more intense listening experiences produced by certain forms of PSB radio not pursued elsewhere for financial or craft reasons, even amongst blogger podcasters. Contrary to previous predictions, podcasting may favour those more intensive forms of listening experience and audio storytelling/sharing built on PSB radio forms. The question of the value of the auditory imagination is raised here, although we have not the time to explore it here.[20] We might add the potential already well in evidence with ipod headphone listening for more intensive listening *experiences* – and full-sized high fidelity headphones favour this too — something which relates especially well to the more expensive and intellectually demanding talk and audio content provided by cultural radio channels internationally.[21] With their maintenance of content-driven block programming and unique radiophonic forms such as the radio feature and documentary (abandoned or left unexplored by almost all of the commercials), PSB radio has renewed opportunities to offer a diversity of distinct program packages for podcast – driven less by music than the voice.

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[19] In The Gift, Lewis Hyde advocates a freeing up of the cultural wealth found and never depleted in the commons.

[20] Discussed in Bachelard (1951); and Madsen (2007). Bachelard reflects on the role of the auditory imagination in his essay on radio (a draft was written in 1947), arguing the importance of the radio voice "without a face" and its potential to call up, even activate mental images in the mind of the listener.

[21] New forms of cultural radio are emerging beyond the major public service broadcasting institutions. An example is Arte-radio, a podcaster and web radio site, part of the larger Arte organization, renowned for its huge contribution to European independent film and television production. Arte-radio have begun to collaborate too with the BBC, co-producing a bilingual radio drama "Déja Vu" – an 'old' form of radio? – available as a podcast in two languages. Go to www.arteradio.org

These will be eminently suitable for replay or re-auditioning,[22]if only managers have sufficient faith in the power and pleasure to be had in an audio-only (*acousmatic)* form, especially in an age supposedly dominated by, and perhaps drowning in, images.

These programs might also be heard with greater levels of attention, rather than the more usual and familiar mode of everyday radio listening – oscillating between high levels of attention and distraction, foregrounding and backgrounding. In the age of podcasting, we can imagine this kind of PSB programming to be ideally suited to this expanded, intimate yet exploded dissemination environment.[23] The rich *pod-ecology* that some PSB forms appear to favour may also mean that we are no longer wedded to the present tense and the once-only real-time (essentially evanescent) broadcast. Through the archive activated by podcasting, diverse individuals and communities may find themselves in contact, and that dream of an early mystical form of radio connecting the living with the creative commons of the dead (to bring back John Durham Peters) may also find itself a reality.[24] Stirring new life out of the once dormant but latent archive is something that all kinds of cultural institutions, including public broadcasting institutions are participating in, and can activate, if the ecology (and ethics) are right.[25]

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[22] Many programs are presented as the original; others are compiled into special podcast programmes offering highlights or new mixes of content from the existing material. The ABC's Radio National channel has a "shuffle mode" program giving the user a random selection of programs of the day or the week or even the month. And there are now podcast only programs not accessible on real time radio.

[23] "Radio will give a rhythm and a human touch to the digital traffic of the 21st century", Raina Konstantinova, European Broadcasting Union (EBU) Radio Director, in her opening speech to the 2005 "Radio Day of European Culture: the unification of Europe—on air" (Konstantinova, 2005).

[24] The BBC was one of the first public and cultural institutions to recognise this potential of the archive: the dormant seed awaiting new conduits and potentialities of distribution. It proclaims a new and ambitious project (2009) to deliver its programming (first as web pages, later as audio and video files on the web) into the public domain via an already existing library's protocols (the British Film Institute BFI is one suggested conduit). Copyright issues are still a complicating factor however, as they currently are for much music and dramatic production. The ABC for example has no podcasting copyright agreement with the Media Alliance Union, covering professional actors, nor can it podcast much music programming.

[25] This is why a wide range of cultural and educational institutions internationally are taking up podcasting as ways of expanding their voice. U Channel, through Princeton University is a podcasting/vodcasting site, acting as

Podcasting re-activates possibilities of the creative commons as reservoir of cultural wealth for all: not in the limited sense of allowing unfettered dialogue and remix or information, but allowing voices, space and time to re-sound, in a new environment/ecology, through time/space shifting and dissemination. In keeping with the gift culture pod metaphor (the ethos of the pod) – and while including the opportunity for rhizomatic horizontal movement/multiplication – voices transformed by mp3 technologies available for download also potentially can extend themselves not only into space but forwards through time. This is a new and revolutionary quality in the logosphere which takes us past radio's former "ghastly impermanence" (Sieveking, 1934, p 15).

In podcasting and archived streamed media, we are witnessing the creation and the reactivation of a vast reservoir of voices. Broadcast voices no longer fade into the ether with each passing moment; no longer are they dead letters or confined to the closed circuit of the activist couple, or even to resonate only in the memory of a generation of listeners. These are voices however, which require a sustaining matrix in which to germinate and thrive; through this milieu, if sustained, they may well have the chance to keep speaking to us into the future.

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an aggregator and "host" for intellectual debate and thought, giving us the voices of major thinkers. U channel is sourced at http://uc.princeton.edu/main

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