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Radio Audiences and Participation in the Age of Network Society

Edited by
Tiziano Bonini and Belén Monclús



Radio Audiences and Participation in the Age of Network Society

This book maps, describes and further explores all contemporary forms of interaction between radio and its public, with a specific focus on those forms of content co-creation that link producers and listeners. Each essay will analyse one or more case studies, piecing together a map of emerging co-creation practices in contemporary radio. Contributors describe the rise of a new class of radio listeners: the networked ones. Networked audiences are made up of listeners that are not only able to produce written and audio content for radio and co-create along with the radio producers (even definitively bypassing the central hub of the radio station, by making podcasts), but that also produce social data, calling for an alternative rating system, which is less focused on attention and more on other sources, such as engagement, sentiment, affection, reputation and influence. What are the economic and political consequences of this paradigm shift? How are radio audiences perceived by radio producers in this new radioscope? What's the true value of radio audiences in this new frame? How do radio audiences take part in the radio flow in this age? Are audiences' interactions and co-creations overrated or underrated by radio producers? To what extent can listener-generated content be considered a form of participation or "free labour" exploitation? What's the role of community radio in this new context? These are some of the many issues that this book aims to explore.

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*To Adria and Enrico.
To Herminia and Ricard*

*Hang the blessed DJ
Because the music that they constantly play
It says nothing to me about my life
(The Smiths, 1986)*

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Preface

There's no doubt we're in the midst of a new and exciting age in radio's history. Audiences, it seems, are being given the chance—are actively seizing the opportunity—of a dramatically expanded share in determining what happens on air. Social media are at the root of this change. And as a consequence, social media will soon become an innate part of our understanding of what constitutes 'radio.' Texting, messaging, time-shifting, re-mixing, using Facebook or Twitter: all these provide new and potentially destabilising means of interaction between radio's producers and radio's consumers. Indeed, the enfolding of social media within the very fabric of radio—the emergence of what we might call 'social radio'—surely challenges that very distinction between 'producer' and 'consumer.' We are, as they say, all makers now.

Sometimes, as the essays gathered here make clear, this new, participatory world offers audiences a role that doesn't quite extend to full-scale co-creation of output. When we scratch the frantic, beguiling surface of interactivity, we often discover little more than what Tiziano Bonini in his introduction calls a 'sequence of action and reaction'—where those in the studio and behind the microphone still call the tune. But, as he goes on to argue—and as we recognise more and more as the book progresses—this is very much at the 'minimal' end of a vast spectrum of new behaviours. There are other examples—the collective production of a playlist, the crowdsourcing of a documentary and so on—where we can sense a rather more equal power relationship emerging.

It's right to be excited. But we also need to be wary. We should, for instance, remain mindful of the dynamic qualities of the past—which are often underappreciated. We also need to be mindful of the powerful restraints on change today—to retain a grasp of the larger political economy. Radio, now as much as ever, is a significant sector in the media industry. As a business, it remains prone to inertia, weighed down by vested interests, or force of habit, or the simple desire to play safe in the interests of profit. Different parts of the world will respond to innovation in different ways and at different speeds. Nevertheless, radio also has an insurrectionary side to its character: it is, and always has been, highly mutable, fleet-footed—a form of communication capable of taking risks, aesthetically, technically, editorially. Those who make it, study it, care for it, have long harboured anxieties about this 'old' medium being eclipsed by a succession of other, newer, more

viscerally exciting media. Nowadays it is the Internet. Half a century ago it was television. Each new arrival has provoked a step-change in the character of radio. Indeed, it is quite possibly this nervy sense of existential threat that explains precisely why radio practitioners have always been trying harder than almost anyone else to reinvent their craft.

If we want to sort out the truly new from the superficially new, a strong sense of history is vital, then. In our own age of interactivity, we're sometimes too ready to assume that 'the listener' has been discovered—or rather empowered—for the first time. But the numbers of people communicating with their favourite radio station, seeking to express an opinion or challenge its decisions, have always been staggering—as Tiziano Bonini demonstrates vividly in his introduction. Now, it's true that many broadcasters, most notably the BBC under its founding father John Reith, were notoriously reluctant to pander to audience tastes.

As Reith himself saw it, the BBC's historic task was to lead and to shape public attitudes, not to follow them. Even so, none of these thousands upon thousands of letters was ignored entirely. Indeed, to eavesdrop on the decision-making process inside the BBC—as I have done myself through archival research—is to witness an organisation often pathologically concerned with the minute-by-minute opinions of its listeners.

Here, the distinction between commercial radio and public service radio—though never absolute—is still useful. For while commercial radio has always had an intrinsic interest in ratings and in aggregating listeners into 'demographics' or markets, public service radio has always claimed to be an ethical project: one in which 'audiences' are less important than the notion of 'the public.' It is a notion that refuses—has always refused—to see listeners as inert bodies and minds, passively waiting to be 'filled up' with what they are given. It assumes—has always assumed—that they are capable of growth and change. In this conception, radio has continually operated on the basis of a symbiotic relationship between broadcaster and listener. Indeed, those words 'service' and 'public' are not insignificant. Indeed, they say it all. Everything they do, they do for us.

Of course, one of the features of the interactive age is that we've decided we don't actually want them to do it all for us. We want to do it for ourselves. But even here, we need pause for thought. It's great if anyone and everyone can feel involved in the making and shaping of radio. But it's great too, sometimes, just to be allowed to listen—even to listen in what we think of as a 'passive' way. As Kate Lacey argues in her recent and profoundly important book, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), listening to others is just as important a part of the communicative process—and certainly just as important a part of the deliberative process in a modern democracy—as speaking to others. In this respect, keeping quiet and keeping still embodies a form of radical openness. We might also remember the concept of broadcasting articulated most clearly by writers such as Paddy Scannell and John Durham

Peters: as something freely given—scattered in the wind, as it were—without any formal expectation of response: in short, a gift. Then again, we might also remember that interactivity—even at the ‘maximum’ end of the spectrum of participation—does not always represent a form of real power or influence in the wider world. As those who have studied the role of social media in the Arab Spring—and in its dispiriting aftermath—have noted, interactivity can often distract from collective effort as well as co-ordinate it. Invest too much hope in it, and we shall be disappointed.

In reading these chapters, then, the crucial challenge for us is not just to see all these changes in radio delineated but also to understand them in a broader critical—and politically aware—perspective. How might they change the act of listening at a fundamental level? What, if anything, remains of the valuable notion of ‘the public’? What is the intrinsic social or cultural value of the various forms of interactivity uncovered here? What are the affective powers of a more interactive form of radio—or, more specifically, how does it provide pleasure, joy, companionship, understanding, escape, relaxation or inspiration? And, perhaps most crucially of all: what guarantees are there that creativity—something which, after all, has long been associated with the work of the lone ‘genius,’ or at least the paid labour of the practised, professional radio ‘craftsman’—is being preserved or enhanced as we shift inexorably towards a world of co-creation? In other words, how can we be sure we’re not losing valuable dimensions of the radio experience as we gaze, mesmerized, at the shiny new ones?

To pose all these questions is not to doubt the force—or the advantages—of change. It is merely to suggest that as we read the fascinating essays in this edited collection, we should keep digging deep and occasionally do some standing back. Above all, it is to argue that we should always keep asking what we want radio to do for us—what its larger social and political purposes should be. We can certainly sense here the variety and vitality of radio. This is emphatically and brilliantly a book for allowing us to think of it afresh. But what should we take from this collection as a whole? Where is radio heading? Can we be sure that this wonderful medium, which did so much to shape the last century in quite profound ways, will continue to do the same in the present one? In the past it has helped connect us with the world at large—to lift our horizons beyond our own small corner of life. It has provided a space for contemplation and imagination, for evoking memories, for generating in its liveness and its reach a powerful sense of the collective. At best, it has offered a cluttered mosaic of sounds—factual, fictional, demotic and high-flown. How we shape the network society to our own human ends, so that it helps us to retain all this, even as radio opens up new and as yet unknown possibilities, is, I think, the most important question of all.

David Hendy
University of Sussex
May 2014

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Introduction

The Listener as Producer: The Rise of the Networked Listener

Tiziano Bonini

“Audiences should be eliminated entirely.”

(Kaprow 1996, 713)

“Every time a new consumer joins this media landscape, a new producer joins as well because the same equipment—phones, computers—lets you consume and produce. It is as if when you bought a book, they threw in the printing press for free.”

(Shirky 2005)

“The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that run one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another and who today are not in a situation like that at all.”

(Rosen 2008, 163)

“We have three different ways of reaching our audience and interacting with our audience; that’s broadcast, digital and social—and they are equally important.”

(Martin Jönsson, deputy director of Swedish Radio, quoted in Marshall 2013)

This book is divided into two macro-sections: “Interactive Publics” and “Productive Publics.” These two sections do not represent two different worlds of practices but, conversely, describe two different moments of the same process: audience participation mediated by radio. We conceive of audience participation in radio as a process that is articulated along a continuum, moving from interaction (with a low level of activity) to co-creation (Banks and Deuze 2009) and co-production (with a high level of

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participation). Here we will show and analyse different innovative practices of interaction and participation.

In this body of work, interactivity is intended in both its minimal technical meaning, as a sequence of action and reaction, as well as in the wider sense of a social-communicative relationship (listeners that reply to a call by a radio host by either phone, smartphone messaging systems, email or Facebook/Twitter texts; listeners that react to a call by a radio host by doing something, such as downloading content or liking/commenting/sharing social media posts; radio hosts and authors that reply to questions and content coming from listeners).

The boundary between interactive and productive publics is traced according to the ideal model of audience participation, the AIP model—access, interaction, participation (Carpentier 2007), where: “this difference between participation on the one hand, and access and interaction on the other, is located within the key role that is attributed to power, and to equal(ised) power relations in decision-making processes” (Carpentier 2011, 29). According to the AIP model, in the first section, contributors will analyse processes of participation that allow listeners to produce content (Short Message Service [SMS], phone calls, social media messages, etc.) but do not let them take part in the co-creation of radio programmes in any way.

The first section of this work will analyse contemporary forms of interaction between radio and its listeners, using specific case studies to examine all the technological means that are currently involved in these processes: the telephone, short text messages, social network sites (SNSs).

The second section will focus on examples in which the radio public not only reacts to the producers’ requests using the technology at hand, but consciously participates in the production of radio content and has some voice in deciding the content being produced. Some examples in this section will look at the collective production of a playlist used by music programmes: a number of programmes have been built upon listeners’ requests and music choices, by different means.

Further examples of co-creation refer to other genres, such as the documentary. In Sweden, Germany, Italy and Latin America, some radio producers seek to involve the public in one or more steps of the productive process of a radio documentary, by means of crowdfunding as well.

The title of the book, *Radio Audiences and Participation in the Age of Network Society*, highlights the paradigm shift that is transforming the nature of mass media audiences and publics. The rise of the network society (Castells 1996; van Dijck 1999; Wellman 2001), due to the diffusion of information and communication technologies, is also restructuring the topology, the properties and the very nature of media audiences, which have ceased to be understandable only as *diffused* in time and space (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). Audiences and publics attracted to media such as radio are no longer invisible, silent and disconnected. Listening habits are changing and listeners are increasingly used to both listen to radio and leave

comments on social media, where their feelings and opinions are public, searchable, accessible and measurable. As Lacey (2013, 155) claims:

Listeners are able to represent their listening to their social networks and track others' online listening in real or archived time. On the one hand, this means that listening is a practise that is increasingly surveilled and increasingly open to measurement and commodification. On the other hand, it is also a sign of persistent desire to create and partake in forms of collective listenings to mediated music, sound and speech, albeit in virtual space.

Radio audiences are a mix of traditional radio broadcasting audiences and networked publics (Boyd 2011; Varnelis 2008). This means not only that new media are changing the nature of listeners/viewers, transforming them into interactive users (Livingstone 2003), but also that radio publics, once organised into networks, now have different properties, different behaviours and different affordances. Networked publics are made up of listeners who are able to not only produce written and audio content for radio and co-create along with the radio producers (even definitively bypassing the central hub of the radio station), but that also produce social data, calling for an alternative rating system, which is less focused on attention and more on other sources, such as engagement, sentiment, affection, reputation and influence. What are the economic and political consequences of this paradigm shift? (see chapter 13). How are radio audiences perceived by radio producers in this new radiospace? (see chapter 2, 3, 4 and 6). What's the true value of radio audiences in this new frame? (see chapter 13). How do radio audiences take part in the radio flow in this age? (see chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12). Are audiences' interactions and co-creations overrated or underrated (see chapter 2) by radio producers? What's the role of community radio in this new context? (see chapter 10, 11 and 12). These are some of the many issues that this present book aims to explore.

FROM MASS AUDIENCES TO NETWORKED LISTENERS: THE FOUR AGES OF LISTENER PARTICIPATION

There have been several attempts to periodise the history of audiences. One of the best known analyses is Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998). They identified three broad periods of audience history: the simple, co-located, face-to-face audience; the mass audience; and the diffused audience, which is "no longer contained in particular places and times, but rather part and parcel of all aspects of daily life" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, in Livingstone 2005, 26). The diffused audience seems to be the most appropriate category for describing contemporary audiences, but Abercrombie and Longhurst published their work in 1998, at the beginning of the Web 1.0

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era, and their periodisation now needs to be updated, given the great changes in the use of media content caused by the Internet and its further developments (Web 2.0, social media). For this reason, this work aims to propose a different historical periodisation of radio listening, one that is similar to Abercrombie and Longhurst's work, but more suitable to the comprehension of the properties of a media public in the age of the network society. The periodisation developed in the following pages identifies four historical ages corresponding to four different auditory regimes, the last of which is characterised by the hybridisation of broadcasting media with networked media. It remains clear that the emergence of a new regime and a new type of audience does not mean the disappearance of previous ones. As Lacey (2013, 22) maintains, "at any one time there are likely to be multiple 'auditory regimes'" that coexist.

The periodisation proposed here will attempt to portray how audience participation in radio has changed over time and investigate the causes that have determined the emergence of a new relationship between radio and its publics. This work does not want to focus on the progressive increase in the public's participation, corresponding to new technological integrations (telephones, mobile phones, the Internet, social media), but will instead highlight the different potentialities of the public's participation, inscribed in each auditory regime. Regardless of how the radio broadcasting public has often been described, as "disciplined and docile listeners in a space, drastically separate not only from that of the performer but from the fellow public as well" (Hilmes 1997, 186), the historical analysis proposed here shows us how interaction and participation have always been permanent features in the history of the radio audience. Listeners, as Lacey (2013, 113) claimed, "have always been active." Audiences have always longed to participate in radio, but over time this participation has taken on different forms and features.

The First Age (1920–1945): An Invisible Medium for an (Almost) Invisible Public

In this first historical period, radio, the new medium of the early twentieth century, is really, as Brecht maintained in 1934, an outdated device, used for political propaganda, educational purposes and the spread of consumer culture. The speakers are invisible (blindness represents the main feature of radio, according to Arnheim [1972]) and there is only one model: broadcasting, one-to-many communication.

The invention of focus groups (the 1937 Stanton-Lazarsfeld Program Analyzer, as reported by Douglas [2004]) and of the first audience surveys make listening habits measurable, but public sentiment remains undetected. The audience is invisible and inaudible. It is made up of individuals who are not linked to a network and who can only listen, without taking part in the conversation; they cannot publicly manifest their emotions or opinions to the host in real time. On this privatisation of the listening public, Sartre (1990, 271) wrote:

When I listen to a broadcast, the relation between the broadcaster and myself is not a human one: in effect I am passive in relation to what is being said. . . . This passivity . . . can to some extent be resisted: I can write, protest, approve, congratulate, threaten, etc. But it must be noted that these activities will carry weight only if a majority of listeners who do not know me do likewise.

But we also have to remember that “falling silent to listen is not a sign of passivity, nor an act of submission, but is an active part of the communication process” (Lacey 2013, 47). But when listeners weren’t satisfied with the “sit back and listen” model of communication (Gauntlett 2011), what could they do? If they didn’t like a show, or, on the contrary, wanted to express their love for that show, they could do nothing but switch off the radio. Actually, listeners could do something more than switch off the radio: they could write a letter (Razlogova 2011).

Elihu Katz (1950) studied the letters received by the popular US radio host Ted Malone. During its first year on national US radio in 1935, his programme *Between the Bookends* generated between 4,000 and 20,000 fan letters a month, more than any other unsponsored programme at the time. The famous 1938 drama *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles received more than 1,400 letters in the days after the show (Cantril 1940), and the 1939 war drama *They Fly through the Air with the Greatest of Ease* by Norman Corwin received around 1,000 fan letters (Blue 2002). Writing letters to the radio was a widespread practice before the arrival of the telephone (and it has yet to completely disappear). However, as Sayre (1939, 272) claimed in his research on fan letters by the Office of Radio Research:

Fan mail has been one of the curious facts concerning the radio industry. . . . In recent years fan letter writers have been thought to be among the neurotic, the deviates, the abnormal among the listeners. . . . As an answer to this, the theory has been proposed that fan-letter writers were not neurotic in what they thought, but in the fact that they wrote at all. They merely expressed attitudes held by other listeners, but differed from them in their ability to transgress the barrier between themselves and the impersonal broadcasting company.

As Sayre showed, the fans that wrote letters were considered misfits, weird people when compared with the normal and silent ones. If a minority of the public was inclined to dialogue and interaction, this participation was neither encouraged nor understood by radio producers in this first historical phase. Listeners were perceived by the American broadcasters as a mass of passive consumers, by the European public services as a mass of citizens to be culturally lifted up, and by the totalitarian regimes as a mass of opinions to be ideologically moulded. Nevertheless, writing letters to the radio has always been a (forgotten) tradition of audience participation. As

6 Introduction

David Hendy (2013a, 122) remembers, “in 1970 BBC received 227,167 letters and phone calls about its programmes. This figure doesn’t include the much larger number of fan-letters addressed directly to programme-presenters, just those written to the Corporation centrally.”

Even though the dominant auditory regime was that of silent and private listening, Lacey reminds us that in the same period in the US and in Europe, many collective listening groups were created, an aspect that is easily forgotten by the history of broadcasting: “Radio was never only a solitary experience” (Lacey 2013, 135). In the UK at the end of the 1920s, approximately 20,000 listeners had organised listening groups. In the US, there were around 15,000 collective listening groups at the end of the 1930s.

Between 1924 and 1932 in the Weimar Republic, hundreds of collective listening groups were formed, the ‘workers radio clubs.’ One of their main objectives was to encourage a critical ear in their members by organising collective listening. Groups as large as 500 would gather in public halls to listen to the radio and to generate a critical public discussion of the output, not just in the hall but by sending reports of the proceedings to the party press and to the radio authorities (Lacey 2013, 150).

Even in an age characterised by the use of this means of communication by the strongly top-down radio institutions, there were clear attempts by the public to take part in the discussion and to meet in public spaces for collective and connected listening. Even in its first years of life, radio was ready to be used as a ‘social medium,’ able to interact and to connect people.

The first authors to understand the value of radio as a social medium, rather than as a distributor of content, were Brecht and Benjamin. But before Brecht, and even more remarkably, Walter Benjamin realised radio’s radical potential as a ‘social medium.’ Benjamin, having produced ninety programmes for the public radio of the Weimar Republic between 1929 and 1933, had a deeper knowledge of this means of communication and maintained a positive outlook on radio, as it had the ability, in his view, to transform the public’s relation to culture and politics (Baudouin 2009). In *Reflections on Radio* Benjamin (1999a, 543) expresses the most fruitful ideas for our own times:

The crucial failing of [radio] has been to perpetuate the fundamental separation between producers and the public, a separation that is at odds with its technological basis. (. . .) The public has to be turned into the witnesses of interviews and conversations in which now this person and now that one has the opportunity to make himself heard.

The radio that Benjamin is advocating is a medium that closes the gap between broadcaster and receiver, allowing both the author/host and the listener to play the role of producer. The importance that Benjamin attributes to active reception is in stark contrast to the hypnotic effect of Nazi aesthetics (Baudouin 2009) and to the allure of a radio show seen as a product to

be consumed. Benjamin juxtaposes the aestheticisation of politics and art embodied by Nazism (and more in general by propaganda and consumer culture) with the politicisation of art, something which requires, in his view, a more active and participant role for the listener.

Benjamin (1978) further developed this theme in *The Author as Producer*, a paper in which he pointed out the need for a new intellectual/producer figure (writer, photographer, radio drama author, film director) and the end of the distance between writer and reader due to the advent of new mechanical and electrical reproduction technologies. Benjamin noticed that a growing number of people had started to become ‘collaborators’ in his own time through the rise of the newspaper, as editors created new columns according to the current tastes of their readers. These spaces were meant to make readers feel in touch with their culture, and in this sense the reader became a kind of author (Navas 2005). Benjamin (1999a, 771) saw the reader as redefining the literary text; his example was the Russian press:

For as writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public, which is upheld by the bourgeois press, begins in the Soviet press to disappear. For the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert even if not on a subject but only on the post he occupies he gains access to authorship.

Focus on the public’s feedback can also be found in another short essay from 1932, *Two Types of Popularity* (Benjamin 1999b), in which he assesses the role of radio as a pedagogical tool. Benjamin is convinced that the public should be respected, rather than being given content in a top-down fashion; it should also perceive that its interests are ‘real’ and are being taken into account by the speaker. Benjamin puts the transmitter and the receiver on the same horizontal level.

Benjamin’s ideas are especially relevant today for their focus on listener feedback. The German philosopher grasped the distinctive quality of a fledgling, electronically mediated society in its potential for public participation/production.

The Second Age (1945–1994): An Invisible Medium for an Audible Public

This second stage is marked by: (1) the appearance of the transistor, which made radio listening mobile; (2) the birth of underground radio (pirate radio and free radio, according to the definitions given by Hendy [2000]); and (3) the introduction of the telephone into radio’s productive practices, which made reaching people’s voices outside the studio easier.

In Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, the transistor, underground radio and the telephone contributed significantly to blurring the lines between producers and listeners. In Paris, during the first days of May 1968, demonstrators tactically reclaimed radio thanks to transistors in order to communicate and organise protests in the streets (Bonini 2009; Sullerot 1968).

Between 1959 and 1964, the pirate radio stations of baby boomers (listeners who were tired of the public stations in their countries and decided to create their own means of communication) were born in international waters offshore from Holland, Denmark and the UK; independent local radio was established in the UK in 1973 and, as Guy Starkey reminds us in chapter 3, they relied a lot on call-in shows; between 1969 and 1980, thousands of free radio stations (*radio libere*)—unlicensed broadcasting stations—were created in Italy, shifting the balance of communication towards civil society (Downing 1984; Lewis and Booth 1990).

The free radio movement emerged in a social climate full of strong demands. People reclaimed the media for themselves. The monopoly on communication practised by public services could no longer adequately respond to the stimuli of society. The social and cultural climate of this age had a great influence on the public service, which was slowly attempting to self-regenerate and open itself up to the call for participation. All over Europe, public service radio was trying to cope with this demand. In Denmark, for example, public service radio tried to open its microphone to the listener's voice: Mette Simonsen Abildgaard (2014, forthcoming) investigated the radio listeners' and hosts' use of an answering machine in Danish public service radio's popular youth programme *P4 i P1*, which was created in the highly politicised climate of the 1970s. *P4 i P1* thus contained several experiments with emancipatory two-way radio for working-class youth, inspired by critical media theories such as Enzensberger's (1970) *Constituents for a Theory of the Media*.

In Italy, the work of Andrea Camilleri is well known; now a prominent Italian writer of bestsellers, he was once a radio producer for RAI, the Italian public service broadcaster. In 1974, along with Sergio Liberovici, he produced an inspiring and thought-provoking docu-drama, *Outis Topos*. The 50-minute radio show was the result of the editing of 200 hours of inhabitants' recordings in an outlying neighbourhood in Turin. The work is subtitled "Hypothesis of a Future Radio" and considers the issue of 'popular' radio created by citizens, not imposed from the top. Camilleri's description of this radio drama is revealing:

The imbalance between the technical evolution of the means and the systems that manage it is increasingly clear. . . . Nevertheless, one of the possible answers may lie in the radical invention of its traditional functions: not only transmitting but receiving, not only allowing listeners to hear something but also allowing them to speak, not isolating them but connecting them with others, not only 'refueling' them but making

them become active, producers. . . . An experiment in citizens' self-management of radio, performed by the RAI in the first 25 days of July in a series of working-class neighbourhoods in Turin, provided a mass of information that was stimulating, though not always encouraging: beyond the unpredictability and authenticity of the speakers, what emerged was the conditioning deriving from the sometimes unconscious acquisition of certain expressive stereotypes, evoked by the great means of mass communication.

(Malatini 1981, 127)

But not only did listeners want to participate in communication through the mediation by public services: they wanted to bypass the institutions and take control of these means of communication.

"In 1977, Felix Guattari proudly announced that the Italian free radio stations had succeeded in creating the first electronic agora: the immense permanent meeting of the airwaves. The listeners were now broadcasters" (Barbrook 2007, 283). Guattari (1978, 1979) stressed the radically different function of free radio as opposed to conventional mass media. His notions of transmission, transversal and molecular revolution suggested that, unlike conventional radio, free radio would not impose programmes on a mass audience, but would come across freely to a molecular public, in a way that would change the nature of communication between those who speak and those who listen.

In 1983 in Japan, following the experience of the Italian free radio and autonomist movements, Tetsuo Kogawa founded the Mini-FM movement, a network of hundreds of low-power FM radios (with a radius of 100–500 meters) built up by very small communities of listeners/producers:

We tried to think about radio in a different way, as a means to link people together. To the extent that each community and individual has different thoughts and feelings, we believed there should be different kinds of radio—hundreds of mini-FM stations in a given area. (. . .) Radio could serve as a communication vehicle, not for broadcasting but for the individuals involved. (. . .) One must admit that mini-FM has a powerful therapeutic function: an isolated person who sought companionship through radio happened to hear us and visited the mini-FM station; a shy person started to speak into the microphone; people who never used to be able to share ideas and values found a place for dialogue; an intimate couple discovered otherwise unknown fundamental misunderstandings.

(Kogawa 1992)

The situationist dream of breaking down the boundary between media producers and consumers is (partly) coming true. Free radio stations, as well as giving voice to sectors of society that were previously ignored, introduced

the significant use of the telephone to communicate with their public. Audience participation by telephone dates back to the mid-1940s for US commercial radio stations (the call-in radio format) and to the mid-1960s for European public radio. These are followed by free radios, which make the ‘talk radio/open microphone’ format the distinctive feature of their communication model, as the *Manifesto of Radio Popolare of Milan* (1975), written by its founder, journalist Piero Scaramucci, clearly highlighted:

The telephone relationship with the public must be possible throughout the broadcasting day. The listener can intervene to give news, to pose a problem, to answer a question asked in the studio, to promote an initiative; the call can be an opportunity for a new, improvised broadcast, it can open up a case.

(Ferrentino, Gattuso and Bonini 2006, 144)

Radio Popolare also used to select new contributors, producers and hosts from among the listeners who participated the most through phone calls: listeners became ‘accomplices,’ as Lewis and Booth (1990) brilliantly defined the audience of the European free radios.

Beyond the emergence of free radio, a great contribution to the diffusion of participatory practices was given by the *MacBride Commission Report* (MacBride 1984). Carpentier (2011, 90) emphasises how the *MacBride Commission Report* “took a strong position on audience participation.” The fundamental features of this participation, according to the *MacBride Report*, were: (a) a broader popular access to the media, (b) the participation of nonprofessionals in producing and broadcasting programmes, and (c) the participation of the community and media users in management and decision making. This report served as a theoretical frame of reference for regulating nonprofit radio all over the world. Between the 1980s and 2000s, also thanks to the contribution of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (founded in 1983), more and more nations have reformed their regulations in the field of communications and have introduced specific licences for community media (Canada and Australia in 1975, Sweden in 1979, Italy in 1990, the UK in 2002).

The public of free, underground and community radio stations is in part a productive one: it participates in a collective conversation, as Benjamin imagined in 1934, and as in community radio (see chapter 10), it even participates in the radio’s management and decision making. Listeners begin to take part in radio production, both by using the telephone and by creating new radio stations. The public is still invisible, but it has become audible. Listeners’ opinions and emotions are becoming increasingly public, but not measurable. The possibility of connecting more than one telephone line to the radio mixer allows the host to speak to several listeners simultaneously, or to make them interact with each other horizontally, so that more people are involved in the radio conversation (Pinseler 2008). However, a large

part of the public—those not calling the radio, not building a station or not contributing to a pirate radio programme—remains passive, private and not linked together.

The Third Age (1994–2004): An Invisible Medium for a Readable Public

The technological innovations of this third phase are mobile telephones, text messaging, the World Wide Web, audio streaming, emails and, subsequently, blogs and podcasting. Mobile phones further facilitated radio reporting and producing from outside the studio, as well as listener participation in the radio conversation. The possibility of calling the radio station from a public place with a mobile phone transformed the role of the audience: from private citizens to potential reporters, or citizen journalists. The public's contribution to radio content production had a chance to evolve and strengthen. Listeners began producing information streams from the places they were calling from (traffic news, current affairs, local news, etc.). *Caterpillar* is a perfect example of this model: a radio programme born in 1997 and aired by Radio2 RAI—the Italian second national public service radio channel—it transformed listeners living abroad into foreign affairs correspondents.

This third auditory regime is also a readable one: radio producers not only listened to the voice of their public, but also read them through text messages; at the same time, listeners not only listened to the host's voice, but could read his blog and his replies to them by email.

Text messages and emails updated the private relationship between host and listener, which until then was only based on paper letters. The speed at which short digital texts could be transmitted thanks to mobile text messaging services and emails increased audience feedback to radio stations. This increase in textual flow became an invaluable source of information for producers; the information, filtered and re-elaborated, was then transformed into new content, ready to enter the radio flow. Software designed to manage emails and SMS enabled radio stations to organise content received by email or SMS in real time, to choose the most appropriate ones for the programme, and to broadcast them a few seconds or minutes after receiving them. Thus both the spatial and temporal distance between producer and listener were reduced. The readability and real-time access of SMS and email enhanced the publicness of the public's opinions and feelings. The public was not only audible, but easily readable as well (see chapter 3). Its emotions and opinions, however, still remained unmeasured.

The invention of streaming technology (1995) and subsequently of blogs (1999) and podcasting (2004) furthered the move towards public participation in audio communication introduced by free radio in the 1960s and 1970s. Free radio was the first to shift the balance of broadcasting from the institutions towards the individual. The encounter between radio and the

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Internet was another step forward in this direction, bringing this process of the 'de-institutionalisation of communication' (Bonini 2006) a step forward: the costs of accessing communication tools lowered, as opening a Web radio cost less than an FM transmitter. The digitisation of cultural products (mp3 and other formats), the diffusion of simple free software for digital audio editing (Audacity) and the progressive increase in speed of Internet connections allowed for many more people to create radio content and broadcast it via streaming than in previous ages.

Streaming happenings were born, in which a number of musicians played together or shared show schedules with programs broadcast from different places in the world (Horizontal Radio in 1995; Net Aid in 1999). The first community of netcasters was composed of many different kinds of people: computer geeks, musicians, music lovers, open source software programmers, political activists and sound artists. Streaming happenings were a reinvention/remix of the pioneering spirit of the first amateur broadcasters, the free radio movement of the seventies and the first Californian phone phreakers of the 1970s (Johns 2009).

In 2004 another audio (and video) distribution technology was born: podcasting. Podcasting represented a step forward in the transformation of listeners into audio content makers. Streaming allowed listeners to find new ways of broadcasting audio content to be listened to in real time; podcasting, ten years later, allowed them to distribute audio content to be listened to on demand.

There is a thin red line that ties together the communities of amateur broadcasters of the 1920s, the radio pirates of the 1960s, free radio activists, the phone phreakers and computer hackers of the 1970s, the netcasters of the 1990s and the bloggers and podcasters of 2000s: they were all both producers and listeners and were all linked together in networks. Most of them could fit into the category of 'recursive publics' created by social anthropologist Christopher Kelty (2008, 27–28) for the more recent open source communities:

A recursive public is constituted by a shared concern for maintaining the means of association through which they come together as a public. This kind of public includes the activities of making, maintaining and modifying software and networks and represents the subject of this making, maintaining and modifying.

Amateur broadcasters, radio pirates, free radio activists, phone phreakers, netcasters, podcasters and bloggers all demanded autonomy and free self-expression in media use and communication tools. Free software for streaming and blogging represented the opportunity for the revival of this spirit of creative conviviality (Illich 1973), as opposed to passive reception.

Today, netcasters, bloggers and podcasters do not limit themselves to participating in the radio flow produced by traditional broadcasters, but also create their own sound media. Web radio and podcasting are 'bypass

technologies' (Dearman and Galloway 2005), allowing individuals to bypass the entire established radio industry. The radio studio has been out-sourced: 'radio' is wherever I can stream or record a podcast. Listeners (at least a small part of them) have become producers of themselves, and online platforms such as Mixcloud, Soundcloud, Audioboo, Spreaker, Broadcast Yourself, Jelli Radio and others perfectly embody this principle. Spotify, Mixcloud, Audioboo and Spreaker are 'making and networking' tools, they enable people not only to discover and listen to new music and radio content but also to create new ones by themselves. The revival of DIY culture is visible also in the radio producing sector.

The Fourth Age (2004–?): A Visible Medium for a Networked Public

The rise of social networking sites (SNSs) is the milestone of this fourth age. SNSs have existed since 1997 (Boyd and Ellison 2007). The social network that has best integrated with radio has been Facebook, created in 2004, followed by Twitter. The fans/friends/followers of a radio station's or host's Facebook or Twitter profile are a public that is very different from the traditional one: this is due to the specific characteristics of the medium, as well as to changes in consumer culture brought about by the rise of the information economy. The traditional public of broadcasting media still fits the definition given by Gabriel Tarde in 1901, as Arvidsson (2013, 374) highlights: "A public is a mediated association amongst strangers who are united by a however momentary affective intensity that is directed towards a common thing." The new public emerging from the hybridisation of broadcasting and information/communication technologies is a networked one. Listeners are no longer just audiences (Rosen 2008). Of all the changes that network culture may bring us, the reconfiguration of the public sphere is likely to be the most significant.

The network society we live in today has produced a new configuration of mediated publics: the networked publics. Networked publics represent the missing link in Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) historical periodisation. Ito was the first to use the term, in a book published in 2008 and edited by Varnelis:

The term *networked publics* references a linked set of social, cultural and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media. The Internet has not completely changed the media's role in society: mass media, or one-to-many communications, continue to cater to a wide arena of cultural life. What has changed are the ways in which people are networked and mobilized with and through media. The term *networked publics* is an alternative to terms such as *audience* or *consumer*. Rather than assume that everyday media engagement is passive or consumptive, the term

publics foregrounds a more engaged stance. Networked publics take this further; now publics are communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side. Publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception.

(Ito 2008, 2)

This concept was further developed by Danah Boyd. Networked publics are “publics that are restructured by networked technologies” (Boyd 2011, 41). What distinguishes networked publics from other types of publics is their underlying structure: “Networked technologies reorganise how information flows and how people interact with information and each other. In essence, the architecture of networked publics differentiates them from more traditional notions of publics” (Boyd 2011, 41). These kinds of publics, according to Danah Boyd, all share four fundamental affordances that make them different from all the previous mediated publics: “Persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability” (Boyd 2011, 46). Persistence means that, on SNSs, the public’s expressions are automatically recorded and archived. This means that feedback (opinions, feelings and comments) from each listener is public and, since this can remain online for a long time, it can also play a role in shaping the radio station’s reputation. Replicability means that the content produced by networked publics is easily replicable. Scalability in networked publics refers to the possibility of tremendous—albeit not guaranteed—visibility. This means that, for example, individual listeners commenting and talking about a radio show on its social network profile can reach a wide audience. Searchability means that content produced by networked publics can be easily accessed.

Networked publics represent the type of public that has emerged from the network society and refer to any type of public that is organised in a network. Here, listeners from this age will be referred to as networked listeners. Networked listeners belong to the vast multitude of *producers* (Bruns 2008). Producership refers to the type of user-led content creation that takes place in a variety of online environments. This concept blurs the boundaries between passive consumption and active production. However, the term *producer* emphasises the productive aspect of the consumers/users, while the definition proposed here highlights the connections among listeners. Not all networked listeners are producers, not all of them produce informational content; many listeners are still silent, but they are still visible nodes in an interconnected network (the network of a radio’s digital community). The auditory regime found in this fourth phase is one of connected listening, listening that may also be defined as augmented listening, because, either simultaneously or at a later time, radio listening is overlapped with discussion, comments and the production of content on the

social networks connected to the radio. Just as the mix of mobile devices and social network sites represent the second screen of television consumption, they may also represent the second screen of this new augmented radio listening experience.

As pointed out by the Head of the BBC Newsroom, Mary Hockaday, public service broadcasters are “shifting to a new formulation: Inform, Educate and Connect”, which means that they are “no longer just trying to draw people in, but also more confidently reaching out on social networks, and a full range of distribution platforms that work for audiences, and that some of our journalism is done in partnership with the wider world” (Hockaday 2012, 7).

This new media ecosystem, created from a mix of broadcasting (radio) and networking (social media) cultures, has transformed how media content circulates. In this regard, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, 2) refer to *spreadable media* as all the media content that is put into circulation according to a hybrid model, which is a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces:

This shift from diffusion to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstituted messages, but as people who are shaping, reframing and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined. And they are doing so not as isolated individuals, but within larger communities and networks, which allow them to spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity.

Radio, and more generally, media audiences in the age of the network society are better understood as networks of listeners, rather than groups belonging to specific social and economic clusters. Listeners’ actions (making comments, remixing media items, sharing media objects, producing user-generated or user-circulated content) all happen within networks.

As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 12) claimed, the “triple revolution of social networks, Internet and mobile communication” have made possible “the new social operating system we call ‘networked individualism.’ The hallmark of networked individualism is that people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members.” Networked listeners have partial membership in multiple networks and rely less on permanent membership in settled groups. For this reason they should be investigated through the lens of network theory: “In network theory, a node’s relationship to other networks is more important than its own uniqueness. Similarly, today we situate ourselves less as individuals and more as the product of multiple networks composed of both humans and things” (Varnelis 2008, 153).

Rainie and Wellman (2012, 55) believe that “each person has become a communication and information switchboard connecting persons, networks

and institutions.” Listeners are no longer alone and invisible, but connected with many others in a variety of social circles that provide them with diversified portfolios of social capital. The structure and the properties of the social networks of networked listeners associated with a radio or media company is the new frontier of media research. In network analysis, great importance is attributed to: (1) hubs and super connectors, highly connected nodes of the network able to shorten the distance that information must travel; (2) bridging or weak ties, connections between knots belonging to different social circles; weak ties are great for getting information in and out of a cluster of relationships; and (3) bonding or strong ties, connections within the same cluster that are necessary for internal trust, efficiency and solidarity. These three features could become important for radio (and media) audience research as well, as media companies could be progressively more interested in understanding the architecture and the properties of the networked public they have been able to gather around them. Some networks could prove to be made up of very strong community links, while others may be composed of people with many contacts with other social networks. These three characteristics of networks, and others that we still have to discover, could determine a new value of networked audiences, representing the new assets of new audience rating systems.

Some scholars have already tried to visualise the network structures of the social media crowds: Smith et al. (2014) demonstrated that in Twitter there are at least six distinctive structures of social media crowds which form depending on the subject being discussed, the information sources being cited, the social networks of the people talking about the subject, and the leaders of the conversation. Each has a different social structure and shape: divided, unified, fragmented, clustered and inward and outward hub and spokes.

We have shown how the participatory desire of radio listeners has been immanent throughout the history of radio. Listening to radio is different from hearing radio (Lacey 2013): while hearing “emphasizes *perception* and *sensation* of sound, listening emphasizes *attention* and *giving* to another” (Lacey 2013, 17). Listening to radio has always been a cultural activity, an aural experience augmented by side tools of interaction and participation: from letters to social media, people listening to radio have always tried to connect with the speaker and to each other. Letter writing and the collective public listening of the 1930s are the ancestors of phone calls, SMS, emails and social radio tools (SNSs used as second screens) of the contemporary age. The fourth phase, that of networked publics, is only the latest stage of a historical trajectory starting with the invention of electronic media.

Each of these four historical steps of the relationship between radio and its listeners produces a different kind of public, but at the same time these different publics are composed of the same people.

FIVE CHANGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RADIO PRODUCERS AND LISTENERS

The affordances of networked publics have given rise to a series of fundamental changes in how the relationship between radio and its public is conceived. Here, these changes will be identified as the Five Changes:

(1) Change in the Publicness of Publics (More Visible, More Audible, More Measurable)

The listeners connected to a social network site of a radio station have a face, a name, a personal space for discussion (the Facebook Wall, the Twitter Timeline) and a bio-cultural profile (the Info section). Being networked means potentially having more power. As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 13) put it: “Networked individuals have new powers to create media and project their voices to more extended audiences that become part of their social worlds.” This is the end of the public as a mass that is invisible (it cannot be seen by the broadcaster), passive (it cannot take part in the conversation) and insensitive (it cannot express its emotions towards the speaker).

Networked listeners can potentially become extremely popular, through the exposure and the attention gained on digital platforms. According to Alice Marwick (2013), social media are technologies of subjectivity that teach users how to succeed and reach popularity in postmodern consumer societies. Marwick (2013, 16) critically claims that social media educate users to learn marketing techniques such as micro-celebrity, life streaming and self branding—“a strategy of success in which one thinks of oneself as a brand and uses social media to promote it, through creating, presenting and maintaining a strictly edited self.” Borrowing from Foucault, Marwick (2013, 11) argues that “social media have become a way that people govern themselves.”

Listeners take advantage of social media to better present themselves, manage their public image and build their online status, but their potentially increased publicity is often that which benefits technology companies: “A verifiable identity makes it possible to leverage status but it also makes it simple to track people as they move around the web” (Marwick 2013, 17).

The integration of SNSs in radio production routines makes the immaterial capital created by networked listeners become public and tangible. While until recently the audience was invisible to radio and confined to its private sphere, except in the case of phone calls during a programme, today listeners linked to the online profile of a radio programme are no longer invisible or private, and the same goes for their opinions and emotions. And if emotions and opinions are no longer invisible or private, they are measurable (see chapters 4 and 5). For the first time in the history of radio, listeners are not only numbers: their feelings, opinions and reputations are traceable and measurable through netnographic methods (Kozinets 2010) and social network analysis.

In the broadcasting age audience rating systems (diaries, telephone recalls, meters) measured ‘eyeballs’ and attention. In the age of social media, broadcasters can measure more than just attention. The rising importance of a revision of audience measurement was already underlined by Jenkins (2004, 38) at the dawn of the social media age:

The American television industry is increasingly targeting consumers who have a prolonged relationship and active engagement with media content and who show a willingness to track down that content across the cable spectrum and across a range of other media platforms. This next generation audience research focusses attention on what consumers do with media content, seeing each subsequent interaction as valuable because it reinforces their relationship to the series and, potentially, its sponsors.

Affect is a new common good that media corporations are trying to commodify (see chapter 13). While the capitalists of the Industrial Revolution privatised and commodified common lands, social media capitalists like Zuckerberg fenced public conversations into private social media platforms and commodified them, giving rise to what van Dijck (2013) calls a ‘platformed sociality’: the novelty of social media platforms, according to van Dijck (2012, 168), is not that they allow for making connections but “lead to engineering connections.” To this end, Arvidsson (2011, 41) claims that

The remediation of social relations that has accompanied the rise of consumer culture has effectively managed to transform the nature of affect, from something private or at least located in small interaction systems, to something that acquires an objective existence as a value creating ‘substance’ in the public domain. Social media have taken this process one step further.

Networked platforms grant the private sphere civic and social legitimacy, as they effectively augment its connectivity potential. Online social networks, claims Papacharissi (2010, 139), “allow the individual to connect to local and remote spheres of family members, friends and acquaintances, and strong and weaker social ties.” Online social networks publicise the listeners’ private spheres. A person may post a Facebook comment or a tweet that expresses a personal opinion on public affairs being discussed on a talk radio show while on a short break from work. The private sphere of the networked listeners is, as Papacharissi (2010, 133) argued, a “networked private sphere,” a private sphere augmented by online convergent

technologies. In the case of Facebook and other commercial social networks, this augmented publicity of the listeners occurs within “commercially public spaces” (Papacharissi 2010, 129).

(2) Change in the Speaker-to-Listener Relationship

The new communication model deriving from the mix of radio and social media is a hybrid model, partly still broadcast, partly already networked. Radio is still a one-to-many means of communication. However, the telephone already partly made it a one-to-one (phone interview) and many-to-one medium (open mic, phone talk radio); to this we have to add SNSs, which are at the same time one-to-one (chat and Twitter mentions), one-to-many (tweets, Facebook notes or posts), many-to-many (Facebook Home, Twitter hashtags) and many-to-one (Facebook comments) kinds of media.

The mix between radio and the SNS considerably modifies both the hierarchical/vertical relationship between the speaker/host and the public, and the horizontal relationship between each listener. Both types of relationships are approaching a less hierarchical dynamic typical of peer-to-peer culture. Broadcasting logic—filter then publish—is replaced here by a networking logic, publish then filter: networked listeners do not have to wait to be selected to talk on air, they can publish a post on the Facebook page of the radio programme they like.

Networked listeners and radio hosts can become ‘friends’: when a programme’s presenter and one of his or her listeners become friends on Facebook or follow each other on Twitter—even if their relationship is still asymmetric in terms of power—they establish a bi-directional tie: both can navigate on each other’s profile, both can watch each other’s online performance and, at the same time, be actors in it. Both can enact two types of performances, public and private: they can post comments on each other’s walls or reply to each other’s tweets, send each other private messages or communicate by chat or Skype in real time. For the first time in the history of radio, the speaker and the listener can easily communicate privately, far from the ears of other listeners, ‘off air.’ This gives rise to a ‘backstage’ behaviour (Goffman 1959) between host and listener that was previously unimaginable.

This change is a double-edged sword: it has an emancipatory side and a ‘dark’ side. The emancipatory side is that this change allows the listener and the speaker/producer/host of the radio to ‘tune in’ and listen to each other online, exchanging knowledge and ideas (see chapter 4). As Crawford (2009, 525) claimed, “The metaphor of listening can offer a productive way to analyse the forms of online engagement that have previously been overlooked, while also allowing a deeper consideration of the emerging disciplines of online attention.”

On the other hand, the dark side allows radio producers to gather information about consumer habits, tastes and opinions. But this monitoring activity of how many people like/comment/talk of/share their content has more to do with surveillance than with paying real attention to listeners. Listeners don't want to be surveilled, they want to listen and to be listened to. Even if there is a very fine line between surveillance and listening—every listening activity is potentially a surveillance activity—there is a major difference between surveillance and listening: the aim of the first is to track listeners/consumers' behaviours in order to commodify them, while the aim of the latter is to tune in to listeners' thoughts/opinions/comments in order to serve them better quality content that is closer to their needs.

(3) Change in the Listener-to-Listener Relationship

At the same time, the relationship between listeners is similarly changing. Fans of a radio programme can establish links among each other online, exchange public comments on the programme's wall, express more or less appreciation for specific content, exchange content on their personal walls, write each other private messages or chat with each other. The radio's public has never been so visible. While before SNSs the concept of the radio public was a purely abstract entity, one that could be understood sociologically and analysed statistically, today this public is no longer only an imagined one (Anderson 1993): it is a visible network of listeners/producers.

For the first time, people who listen to a radio programme and are its fans on social network sites have the opportunity to see and recognise each other, to communicate, to recommend new contents and to create new links while bypassing the centre, this being the radio programme itself. "The gatekeeping function of mass media is challenged as individuals use digital media to spread messages much farther and more widely than was ever historically possible" (Gurak 2001, 13). While a radio public is an invisible group of people who are not linked together, the SNS audience of a radio programme is a visible group of people/nodes in a network, connected by links of varying intensity which, in some cases, can produce strong links that transcend the broadcaster. By exchanging and sharing content on the social network sites of a radio station, they establish new social ties or reinforce the existent ones. As Rushkoff (2000) put it in an article in *The Guardian*, "content is just a medium for interaction between people."

This change has a dark side as well. Listeners can network together and tune in to each other's social media profiles, exchanging content, opinions, ideas and making new valuable connections, while at the same time engaging in practices of 'coveillance' (Mann, Nolan and Wellman 2003), which means that people can observe and monitor each other as if they were in a collective digital panopticon.

(4) Change in the Value of Publics (SNS Public: Social Capital = Mass Media Public: Economic Capital)

This visible group of listeners/nodes/links is the most important new feature produced by the hybridisation between radio and SNSs. A radio programme's network of friends/fans on SNSs represent its specific social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). While the wider (and invisible) radio public, as charted by audience rating companies, still constitutes the programme's economic capital, this work promotes the idea that the public of social media should be considered the real social capital of a programme, a tangible and visible capital, the meaning of which is well explained by Bourdieu and Wacquant when they define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1992, 14).

However, there is an ongoing discussion on the strength of links within online social networks, as Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007, 1146) noted:

Researchers have emphasized the importance of Internet-based linkages for the formation of weak ties (Granovetter 1973), which serve as the foundation for *bridging* social capital (Putnam 2000). . . . It is possible that new forms of social capital and relationship building will occur on online social network sites.

Bridging social capital might be augmented by such sites, which support loose social ties, allowing users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which they could potentially draw resources (Donath and Boyd 2004; Resnick 2001). Donath and Boyd (2004) hypothesise that SNSs could greatly increase the weak ties one could form and maintain, because the technology is well suited to maintaining such ties cheaply and easily. The definition of bridging social capital—a kind of capital better suited for information diffusion (Putnam 2000) and made of weak ties, which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another, but typically not emotional support—seems to fit the kinds of ties normally found on SNSs. If we consider the networked public that forms around a radio programme as its bridging social capital, we can expect this listener-based network to produce, if not emotional and substantive support, then at least a certain amount of benefits in terms of news, tastes, information retrieval, cultural trends, comments and reviews. If we observe the SNS of the most popular radio programmes, we find that this is already taking place: on an SNS, listeners anticipate/continue discussions on the themes introduced by the radio show, adding comments, content, links, references, quotations and suggestions.

Moreover, the personal information and the public wall posts and tweets on the listeners' SNS profiles can help radio producers to better understand who is hiding behind a comment or link, allowing them to assess the reputation of the listeners/producers and consequently decide if they can trust them or not. The reputation (and trustworthiness) of each single listener belonging to the network of a radio programme contributes to the general reputation of that specific networked public and, due to the transitive property, constitutes the reputational capital of that radio programme. This reputational capital is of great value for radio producers, because, as Arvidsson (2013, 380) puts it: "Reputation is the form social capital takes among strangers. The higher a person's reputation, the easier for her to initiate processes, recruit talented co-workers, or start new projects. Finally reputation enhances the enjoyment of participation." On the public stage of the SNSs, reputation is conferred on an actor by the members of a public. Since, on this stage, radio producers and listeners can act both as actors and audience at the same time, their reputations (both the producer's and the listener's) are being continuously evaluated by the networked listeners. As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 19) claimed, "much of the activity by networked individuals is aimed at gaining and building trust, the primary currency of social networks." The social networks' economy is built on reputation.

It is therefore in the radio producer's interest to develop, nurture and care for this reputational capital and to manage the establishment of a high-quality and highly satisfied networked public. Ellison et al. (2011) showed a clear empirical relationship between a wealthy social network and the production of bonding and bridging social capital: the larger the network, the quicker the response from friends; the greater the network, the greater the social capital produced (in terms of benefits received by the network). Ellison et al. (2011, 138–139) clearly demonstrated that Facebook "enables individuals to: maintain a larger set of weak ties; make ephemeral connections persistent; lower the barriers to initial interaction; make it easier to seek information and support from one's social network and to provide these resources to others."

For radio makers, a wide network of friends/fans/followers is highly important for their future. Even if the fans' network does not generate tangible economic value, as the radio audience already does, it nevertheless generates great reputational capital. The message of the SNS public of a radio programme is the network itself, because this network is able to produce value. The value embedded in the networked public is not yet convertible into economic capital, but the crisis of traditional mass advertising will lead to a future increase in—and refining of—tools for the capitalisation of the wealth of networked publics linked to radio programmes and stations. Besides, building networked and productive publics for radio could be of strategic importance for public service media. Public service media are losing audiences and legitimacy, because they are forgoing serving listeners as citizens (Syvertsen 1999). Since making and participating mean 'connecting'

and creating social relationships, as Gauntlett (2011) has shown, building and nurturing wealthy and productive networked publics for public service media could be an opportunity to legitimise their service as a real public one, a service that provides listeners with tools that let them participate and create new social relationships among each other.

The social capital embedded in the digital audiences of a media company has been well understood by Wolfgang Blau, digital strategist at *The Guardian*, when he claimed in an interview to the Italian magazine *L'Espresso*: “If we could visualize the social relations provided by a newspaper to its listeners, cultural associations, NGOs, clubs, companies, political subjects, cultural institutions, we would realize they look like a huge social network connecting thousands of nodes/people” (Rossano 2013).

In this kind of participatory media environment, the construction of the media company’s reputation is less subject to corporate control and intervention, but it is co-created in a dynamic way along with the audience (Bunting and Lipski 2000; Kozinets 2010).

Although a system for the direct conversion of social capital into economic capital has not yet emerged, a good accumulation of social capital could prove to be fundamental for the success, for example, of a crowdfunding campaign (see chapter 8). The value of networked publics can be understood mostly as social capital, as we suggest here, but other scholars, like Eleanor Baird Stribling (2013), point out that the engagement of fans with a media company could also provide some kind of economic value. Stribling (2013) categorises the “broad spectrum of fan behaviours” into four categories of activity, two which provide direct economic value—“watching, listening or attending” and “purchasing primary or secondary products”—and two which provide indirect economic value, like “endorsing” and “sharing and commenting.”

(5) The Change in the Role of the Radio Author (from Producer to Curator)

Radio is increasingly becoming an aggregator, a filter for the abundance of information, useful especially for the non-prosumer listeners, who do not publish videos and have no time to explore friends’ profiles, which are a true goldmine for discovering new trends. The radio author’s job thus increasingly resembles that of a translator, of someone who connects two worlds—niches and mass culture—by delving into niches and re-emerging with a little treasure trove that can then be used productively. The producer’s function in the age of Facebook is thus to drag content emerging from small islands, small communities and to translate and adapt it to the public of large continents, transforming it into mass culture. Radio authors and producers are becoming more and more similar to the figure of the curator, a cultural shift in the role of all kinds of author’s labour that was already noted by Brian Eno (1991), as Reynolds (2011, 130) reminds us: “Curatorship is

arguably the big new job of our times: it is the task of re-evaluating, filtering, digesting and connecting together. In an age saturated with new artefacts and information, it is perhaps the curator, the connection maker, who is the new storyteller, the meta-author.”

Today’s radio producers do not look for content in the same way they did in the twentieth century. Their job is no longer to seek and create, but to select and co-create. During research for this book, I met and interviewed an Italian producer of a talk radio programme for a national radio broadcaster. He revealed that his work had completely changed with social media:

Now I know the core of my audience, I talk with them, we exchange comments and thoughts via email, private messages on Facebook and mentions, replies and direct messages on Twitter. They spontaneously suggest to me new music songs, excerpts from novels, links to news and to YouTube videos. One of them spontaneously collects the podcasts of all my programmes on his blog, and he has become the most trustable sound archive of my entire radio work. Another keeps on sending me new music he thinks will fit with my playlist. I also play with them on Twitter: once a week we decide the playlist together, I have launched the hashtag #openplaylist. You might think I do this just to save time, or that it’s audience exploitation. It is not, it’s a lot of work for me, but it’s a lot of fun for everyone, they all feel like part of a community and they have the opportunity to proudly share their expertise with a community of people that they trust. I call them the ‘networked newsroom.’¹

This is how the value production process in radio works in the era of SNSs: listeners enact their cultural tastes online, the radio author (increasingly a producer, as Benjamin predicted) re-interprets and re-elaborates them, providing the audience with a dramaturgically constructed listening experience in which it finds its contents mixed together. Listeners comment and supply new material to the community of listeners/producers so that the recursive process can start again. But what about this process? To what extent can we call it co-creation and to what extent must we call it exploitation? Andrejevic (2008) studied the productivity of the fan communities of TV shows and interpreted it as a double form of value-enhancing labour for television producers by allowing fans to take on part of the work of making a show interesting for themselves on the one hand, and by providing instant (if not necessarily statistically representative) feedback to producers on the other hand. But is he right?

As Australian scholar, Maura Edmond (2014), pointed out, “creating radio projects that are more social, immersive and engaging fosters a commercially valuable emotional attachment to a story, show, presenter, station and to a community of fellow listeners (what Jenkins 2006, 13) calls ‘affective economics’.” Audience engagement is being considered more and more commercially valuable, but can this engagement be understood under the frame of labour exploitation theories?

CO-CREATION OR EXPLOITATION?

“We should thus describe this audience labor as engaged rather than exploited.”

(Jenkins et al. 2013, 60)

Radio makers (authors/presenters/producers) and radio listeners, once they are connected through SNSs, belong to the same horizontal and multipolar network. On the SNS stage everyone, radio makers and listeners alike, is able to perform, to take part, to alternatively play the role of the actor (contributing with content) and of the audience (contributing with comments and liking). As Benjamin hoped, the boundaries between authors and ‘readers’ have potentially been broken down.

The connection that has now been established between radio makers and listeners through social media also allows for new forms of content production to emerge, some of which will be analysed in this book (see chapters 6, 7 and 9).

The extent to which listeners take part in these production processes is still controlled by radio makers, who decide how to give value to user-generated content. Much has been written about the ambivalent status of this content as a source of both intrinsic reward and potential exploitation, as social media corporations’ value, Andrejevic (2013, 162) argues, relies on the “private enclosure of productive resources.” When can we still speak of co-creation, and when does cooperation become free-labour exploitation (Fuchs 2010, 2014; Terranova 2000)? Andrejevic (2013) claims that exploitation in social media not only occurs when audience labour (in terms of user-generated content) is not paid, but also when users lose control over their productive and creative activity. Ippolita, Lovink and Rossiter (2009) maintain that exploitation is embedded in SNSs: however radical they may be, they will always be data mined. They are designed to be exploited and to exploit.

The free labour exploitation theorists have built their propositions on a consolidated criticism of the economic policies of commercial media, which was very popular in the 1970s. To a certain extent, the attention of a passive public required by traditional media was already a form of exploitation and production of economic value: this was the late-1970s approach of Canadian media theorist Dallas Smythe (1978), who claimed that viewers were exploited as their viewing time was appropriated by media companies and sold as an ‘audience commodity.’

From a Marxist perspective, audiences have always been put to work by media corporations, who have made a living on the backs of their audiences. From newspapers and radio to television, commercial media (Hearst’s newspapers of the early twentieth century; NBC and ABC radio in the 1920s; today’s commercial television networks like Fox News, just to name a few) have always sold the ‘work’ (attention paid to media content) of listeners to advertising.

Marxist researcher Christian Fuchs is one of the best known scholars to have contributed to the revival of Smythe's approach to the political economy of media. In Fuchs' (2010, 187) view, "citizens who engage in everyday politics" and those "radio listeners and television viewers who call in live" are somehow 'unpaid' knowledge workers being exploited by capital. For Fuchs, it seems, any participation by citizens in the public sphere itself is exploited labour, as opposed to the practical contributions to the democratic formation of public opinion that these citizens themselves clearly understand their actions to be. Fuchs goes even further in framing audience 'labour' as exploitation. He claims that digital users are also exploited: in the case of corporate social media, "the audience commodity is an Internet prosumer commodity" (Fuchs 2013, 217). Therefore, according to the free labour theories, the main reason for the exploitation of the audience's work is its appropriation and commodification, operated by both traditional and new commercial media. As Murdock (1978) already noted, Smythe's approach really only applies to advertiser-supported media. In the case of Facebook, it was Zuckerberg himself who, in 2010, publicly admitted the extraction of value from audience engagement in Facebook: "Our focus is just to help you share information and when you do that you are more engaged with our site and there are more ads on the side of the page and the more you do it the more the model works out."²

But even if we want to believe in the expropriation of value by commercial media, we would realise that yes, this value exists, but it is derisory. For example, let's take the three Italian public service radio channels (Rai Radio1, Radio2 and Radio3, which are also financed by advertising) and divide their total advertising revenue from 2012 (€35.3 million, according to Rai 2013³) by the grand total of their listeners on an average day (9.3 million, according to Eurisko 2012⁴). This gives us the alienated surplus of every single listener, which corresponds to €3.79 per person for an entire year of listening. If we apply the same theory to Facebook's earnings, we obtain similar results: if Facebook made a profit of \$355 million in 2010 (according to its own figures⁵), when the active users were around 500 million, this would mean that each Facebook user was a 'victim of exploitation of surplus value' to the extent of \$0.70 a year. Gauntlett (2011) has made the same calculation for YouTube videos, showing that each video uploaded by users is worth approximately \$1.20.

Smythe's (1978) argument—that audience 'work' can be seen as being exploited in terms of the Marxian labour theory of value—was already controversial at the time of its publication (Hesmondhalgh 2010). This argument by Smythe and his 'sons,' such as Fuchs, has been criticised for two main reasons: (1) what they call audience 'work' cannot simply be called work, because it lacks coercion and (2) their approach doesn't take into account the pleasures of participation (Hesmondhalgh 2010).

Similarly, Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) claimed that making the simple observation that just because media companies like Facebook or branded

corporations like Apple live off audience and consumer co-production does not necessarily mean that the value of such co-production can be estimated in terms of the Marxian labour theory of value. They argue, in response to Fuchs (2010), that the labour theory of value does not apply to the activity of online prosumers, because “the value of online advertising is not primarily dependent on the number of users that a site can attract” or on the “time spent [in] online viewing or interacting with a particular site.” Instead, “value is ever more defined according to the ability to mobilize affective attention and engagement” (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012, 144; see also chapter 13). Jenkins et al. (2013, 116) claim that television (and radio too) is shifting from an attention economy that they call an “appointment based model” towards an “engagement based paradigm.”

Banks and Humphreys (2008) and Banks and Deuze (2009) claimed that users clearly enjoy and benefit from online activities, even if they generate value for commercial media companies. They suggest that user-generated content should be understood in terms of mutual benefit (identity and reputational benefits) rather than of exploitation.

The idea that listener participation in radio’s valuable production (in terms of both attention and actions performed on the social media linked to the radio) can be a source of exploitation is a useful point of view in order to defuse the rhetoric of participation and user-generated content, which new and old commercial media have appropriated. Even so, this work supports the view that the new wave of Marxist criticism of the exploitation of content generated by networked publics, in both traditional and digital media, is unable to comprehend the real value of this participation.

As Jenkins et al. (2013, 58) noted: “We feel it’s crucial to acknowledge the concerns of corporate exploitation of fan labor while still believing that the emerging system places greater power in the hands of the audience when compared to the older broadcast paradigm.”

We believe that many different distinctions can be found between these two extremes of exploitation and co-creation. The AIP model has been proposed by Carpentier (2007, 2011) for the analysis of the public’s participation in the production of media (especially radio) content, which this work finds to be highly capable of considering such distinctions. Carpentier (2011, 24) claims that:

The key defining element of participation is power. The debates on participation in institutionalized politics and in all other societal fields, including media participation, have a lot in common in that they all focus on the distribution of power within society at both the macro-and micro-level. The balance between people’s inclusion in the implicit and explicit decision-making processes within these fields, and their exclusion through the delegation of power (again, implicit or explicit), is central to discussions on participation in all fields.

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