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A psycho-cultural approach to radio listening and creative production

ABSTRACT

1. *This discussant piece introduces and explains a psycho-cultural approach to under-*
2. *standing the emotional dimensions of radio listening and creative production. It then*
3. *explores the ways in which radio is unconsciously used by listeners as a tool for*
4. *maintaining psychic coherency. A psycho-cultural approach is a valuable tool for*
5. *research because it is specifically attuned to the emotional dimensions of radio use*
6. *and programme-making in a therapeutically infused culture. It also provides a means*
7. *of explaining why radio is used in particular ways, in terms of the everyday main-*
8. *tenance of the self. The article closes with a consideration of the meta-psychological*
9. *consequences of convergence and recent developments in listening technologies. The*
10. *aim of the article is to initiate a discussion with radio scholars on the utility of this*
11. *approach.*
12.
13.

KEYWORDS

object relations
  psychoanalysis
psycho-cultural
emotion
engagement
unconscious
self-maintenance

14. In this concluding, discussant piece, I will demonstrate why a psycho-cultural
15. approach should be considered as a complementary tool of analysis which
16. seeks to explain the motives or reasons that lie behind radio listening and
17. programme-making. I will then identify and explore themes in the preceding
18. articles of this issue and re-articulate them from a psycho-cultural perspective
19. informed by object relations psychoanalysis. Object relations psychoanalysis
20. is very wide ranging in its scope and conceptual tools, and only a very small
21. sample of its theoretical contributions feature here. I will present a taste of this
22. *oeuvre:* concepts that have been used by the authors in this issue and have been

used by other media and cultural studies scholars to illuminate media prac- 1.
tices. This will indicate how such an approach can be fruitfully used to address 2.
research questions in radio studies concerned with the emotional dimensions 3.
and uses of radio. First, I will elaborate my own prototype psycho-cultural 4.
approach for researching and analysing radio listening and programming, 5.
which gives equal attention to individual and social processes and the complex 6.
relationship between the two. This is the existing Psychosocial Studies 7.
approach. What is new is its application to the experience of media. I will then 8.
identify and discuss two key themes of the articles in this issue in order to 9.
provide an illustration of the principles of a psycho-cultural approach. As it is 10.
in its infancy, this methodology is still undergoing revision and alteration, and 11.
so it is hoped that this discussion will provide a starting point for a dialogue 12.
with radio studies scholars. I will argue that a psycho-cultural approach is a 13.
valuable tool for research because it is specifically attuned to the emotional 14.
dimensions of radio use and programme-making in a therapeutically infused 15.
culture. It also provides a means of explaining why radio is used in particular 16.
ways, in terms of the everyday maintenance of the self. It is this attention to 17.
the particularities of personal meaning and experience situated in their histori- 18.
cal and social contexts that I think can provide us with a deeper, agent-centred 19.
understanding of radio listening and programme-making. 20.
21.
22.
RADIO IN A THERAPEUTIC CULTURE 23.

The recent (*c.*1995–) emotional or therapeutic turn in entertainment media 24.
content and public life requires an approach that is able to analyse the indi- 25.
vidualized, affective dynamics of social life in their historical specificity. In a 26.
therapeutically influenced public culture such as that found in Europe and 27.
USA today, emotional expression is an important part of public life; individ- 28.
ual psychology is a central feature of how we are addressed and understood 29.
and emotions are considered to be an authentic aspect of effective commu- 30.
nication and listening pleasure. The term 'therapeutic culture' refers to the 31.
influence and application of therapeutic ideas to a wide range of issues and 32.
practices (Furedi 2004). This term has been subject to contestation and debate 33.
(Yates 2011), yet is used here to refer to an increase in emotional expression, 34.
emotional management and an explicit concern for others as emotional selves 35.
in public discourse (Richards and Brown 2002, 2011). As a result, entertain- 36.
ment and public service media are used increasingly in the current historical 37.
period to give expression to and engage with a psychological, emotional self 38.
more than a political or social self. This alters not only how people and their 39.
subjectivities are represented but also self-understandings. A psycho-cultural 40.
approach is particularly interested in exploring this increased emotionality 41.
and consciousness of the self as it is circulated and expressed through media 42.
culture because media can play an important role in the everyday manage- 43.
ment and understanding of the emotional self. 44.
   The question is 'how do we "get at" these affective dimensions, especially 45.
given their non-discursiveness and non-sentential logic?' (Tacchi 2009: 176). 46.
The non-discursive and non-sentential character of emotions is something 47.
that psychoanalysis has investigated for a century, not only through the inti- 48.
mate and long-term clinical encounter but also through the application of 49.
psychoanalytic theory for cultural analysis in anthropology (Born 1998) and 50.
cultural studies of television (Biressi and Nunn 2005; Donald 1985; Silverstone 51.
1993; Walkerdine 1986). Object relations psychoanalysis has most recently 52.

1. been utilized in the analysis of mediated phenomena by scholars working in
2. media and cultural studies and sociology (Bainbridge 2012; Ferguson 2010;
3. Highmore 2011; Hills 2002; Ortega Breton 2011; Yates 2011). My own psycho-
4. cultural approach involves the analysis of both the meanings research partici-
5. pants give to their media activities[1] and the preferred meanings of texts treated
6. as repositories or artefacts of societies (Kellner 1995).
7.   In turning to object relations psychoanalysis, the aim is to 'conduct social
8. research that can bear witness to the emotional and unconscious inter-
9. subjective dynamics that can be found in diverse research settings' (Price and
10. Cooper 2012: 55–56) in their social and historically specific context. How does
11. radio use, for example, contribute or not to the sense of a shared activity or
12. space amongst families and other cohabiting groups; what are the disagree-
13. ments and agreements regarding what to listen to really about, when we
14. consider the differential power relations that exist within classed, gendered
15. and generationally differentiated groups? Before looking at the relational
16. concept of the object in further detail, I will consider the object relations
17. psychoanalytic premise that humans are fundamentally relational beings and
18. the demonstration of this by media generally and radio in particular, founded
19. as they are upon a necessity to engage meaningfully with others.
20.
21. **THE NEED TO ENGAGE OTHERS**
22.
23. Hendy's biography of Sieveking in this issue draws our attention to the desire
24. to engage others through radio. This has a wider relevance given the afforda-
25. bility and ease with which people can now engage with one another in a radio
26. format by using the Internet to distribute podcasts. There is a clear, shared,
27. social value to these types of radio programmes: of significant moments,
28. which are historical events as well as personal milestones.
29.   Departing from the biological drive or instinct models, object relations
30. psychoanalysis characterizes humans as fundamentally 'object seeking' agents
31. (Fairbairn 1944, 1952), which is to say that humans are fundamentally rela-
32. tional. The emphasis on the desire and need for communication with others,
33. in object relations theories of mind, is the first level at which this theory is
34. appropriate for the study of mediation processes, which are made specifically
35. to connect with audiences. This is important because it places autonomously
36. acting subjects at the centre of research; it is a humanist, historical approach.
37. The second necessary aspect of this function of radio, to achieve engagement,
38. is that programmes are meaningful. These attempts to engage are formu-
39. lated in the text through genre, narrative, subject matter and form of address.
40. Talkback radio is one format in particular that allows listeners to connect
41. with one another through subjects that are important to them. A recent study
42. evidenced the importance of radio in providing a sense of connection and
43. companionship for those people experiencing social isolation (Ewart 2011).
44. Talkback radio fostered a sense of community, and helped people with their
45. problems because it constituted a space for sharing which provided a 'reality
46. check' for listeners who can hear the problems of others. This helped listeners
47. to achieve a more manageable perspective on their own problems.
48.
49. **THE RELATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MEANING**
50.
51. The concept of the object relation refers to the basic structure of meaning,
52. consisting of anything given significance by a subject. Balick's article in this
     issue is very helpful in explaining the psychoanalytic use of the term 'object'

1. To learn about a range of ethnographically focused psycho-social approaches, see Day Sclater et al. (eds) (2009).

77

(a mental representation of something of significance, usually a person who represents specific qualities or feelings) and how radio and its contents can become significant objects with positive effects. Textual signs can also be conceptualized as objects in a psychoanalytic sense, because they are also markers of meaning for a particular subject or group of subjects. How the object is used defines and extends the individual putting it to use (Mann 2002). Bollas has outlined uses of objects including evocative (Bollas 1992), passionate (Bollas 1995), conservative (Bollas 1987), terminal (Bollas 1995) and aleatory (Bollas 1992), amongst others. The utility of the psychoanalytic concept of the object, always referred to *in relation to* a subject, allows us to produce a taxonomy of radio uses at the points of production and reception. The distinctiveness of this approach is in accounting for relationality at three interconnected levels: the intra-psychic, the interpersonal and the social. The social is primary because it is experience rather than anything innate that is seen as populating and constructing these distinct domains of human activity. The focus on relationality is a crucial point of difference between the object relations-informed psycho-cultural approach and other forms of psychoanalysis used in film studies and cultural theory. It also provides a point of connection with social scientific and media studies approaches that place social relations at the heart of explanation.

TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Formative, developmental experiences can help to account for the intense emotions associated with some radio activities. As we have seen in Karpf's article, an object relations approach grounds the veracity and intensity of these moments in our formative experiences. The work of Bollas (1979, 1987, 1989), informed by Winnicott's (1971) concept of the infant's mother as an environment, addresses the capacity of caregivers to transform the young they look after. The caregiver cannot yet be experienced as a distinct object but as constituting the whole environment of the infant through the continuous care that is provided. The experience of becoming a conscious, aware person provides the basis and desire for future transformational experiences, as well as also enabling us to appreciate people and media devices as things in themselves. We can conceptualize radio listening and production as a source of transformation because it creates moments that can change ourselves or make us think differently about the world we inhabit. The accounts given in this issue (producers like Lance Sieveking; the audience caller to *The Surgery with Aled*; and Balick himself) all point to the ways in which radio can be part of transformative experiences, whether we are producers or listeners.

THE POTENTIAL SPACE/TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

The transitional space (Winnicott 1971; Yates and Day-Sclater 2000) is a discursive space or cultural field, where reality and fantasy can meet and intermingle in a process that begins with creativity and ends in an engagement with the world. It is the studio of the imagination but also the crucible of discovery. All media create these psycho-cultural 'spaces' by virtue of their representational function: connecting social reality with the subjective, inner world. However, radio is also distinctive and bears greater similarities to the psychoanalytic experience than other media. As psychotherapist Brett Kahr explained in the July 2011 seminar 'Radio Recollections'[2] (from which two of the articles in this issue arose), there are clear physical similarities between

1. the psychoanalytic session and radio listening because of the way in which
2. the voice is experienced. In both psychoanalytic sessions and radio listening,
3. people experience disembodied voices, or, as Karpf suggests, we experience
4. bodies through voices rather than through eyesight and touch. This allows
5. listeners to focus on the qualities and contents of the voice, or give distracted
6. attention to it. The implication of this is that psychoanalytic knowledge about
7. the particular affective qualities of this experience may provide insights into
8. the experience of radio listening.
9. For Winnicott (1971), words, sounds and other verbal avowals are all tran-
10. sitional phenomena. So radio has this unique transitional (neither subjec-
11. tive nor objective) character based on its transcendent, sonic quality (voice,
12. sounds and music).[3] As we have read from the articles in this issue and others
13. (Ewart 2011; Meadows and Foxwell 2011), radio facilitates two simultane-
14. ous processes: a subjective self-maintenance or management process and
15. an engagement with the world process. Both these themes can be thought
16. through in terms of this concept. One projects oneself into the world hoping
17. to find oneself in it whilst seeking others: subjects and objects, to project into
18. and to introject and engage with. Unlike audio-visual media, the creativity of
19. the radio listener is employed to a greater extent, in radio drama for example,
20. and it is through this activity that listeners play with, create and explore ideas
21. in this space created by their choice to listen attentively. Whilst reading litera-
22. ture can also do this, the otherness of radio's address allows the creation of an
23. authentic relationship with what is being listened to.
24. Radio can provide a symbolic, ideational, cultural space for audiences'
25. emotional identifications and explorations of identity and the world around
26. them, but this depends upon the form and content provided in texts, which are
27. shaped by prevailing cultural and political trends (Bainbridge and Yates 2005).
28. At one and the same time the radio programme is an intra-psychic and social
29. product because it has the potential to connect meaningfully with others,
30. producing a socially shared experience. A psycho-cultural approach aims to
31. understand this dualistic relationship between the personal and the social
32. through the discursive, ideological and affective material which constitutes
33. the transitional space.
34. The specific details of how individual feelings interact with social proc-
35. esses of mediation and why people engage with radio in different ways can be
36. established through a psycho-cultural analysis of personal meanings that uses
37. the concept of the unconscious.
38.
39.
40. **THE UNCONSCIOUS**
41. To fully understand why people choose to listen, and then stop choosing
42. but continue to listen anyway, we need to discover people's negotiations
43. of unconscious meanings and object relations in their lived context. One of
44. the premises of a psycho-cultural approach is that significance is shaped by
45. preconscious and unconscious processes as much as it is by conscious ones.
46. Taking a psycho-cultural approach involves considering the role played by
47. individual and social unconscious processes, which influence and shape the
48. meanings we rationally attribute to radio listening and programming.
49. The concept of the unconscious is perhaps the most difficult and challeng-
50. ing aspect of this approach because it refers to mental and social activity that
51. cannot be reduced to rationality or reason, cannot be grasped directly, can be
52. strongly felt but not recognized and can be intentional but not conscious. It is

3. For an exploration of music as a transitional object, see Ostwald in Rauch and Carr (1989: 279–96).

probably also the main reason why psychoanalysis has not been utilized more extensively in academic research.

Using a theory of the unconscious, affective dynamics of the mind and social practice in this way implies that people's perceptions and social representations have a similar symbolic structure because both are made up of object relations, relationships of meaning between a subject and a signifier or symbol. What is significant is significant *for subjects*. This could be criticized as methodologically individualist because it claims that an understanding of the individual mind can be applied to socially produced representations (Frosh and Baraitser 2008). However, individuals are also socially produced through their socialization. That said, the extensive psychoanalytic understanding of groups and social processes is not reducible to a model of individual minds; rather, what we know about how individual minds attribute and process meaning is one element of a psychoanalytic approach to culture (Bell 1999). A great deal of useful psychoanalytic literature also exists on how groups and organizations function (Bion 1961; Foulkes 1975; Ezriel 1973; and the journal *Group Analysis*).

The use of the concept of the unconscious allows us to consider generic and aesthetic judgements and choices in radio production that writers and producers may or may not be consciously aware of in everyday praxis. The social, material and discursive circumstances we act within have dynamic structures that as a society we reproduce consciously and unconsciously. Ideas can move from unconscious to conscious and vice versa, as this is a dynamic historical process. History and contemporary circumstances provide us with indicators as to what kinds of unconscious meanings may be shaping representations. To claim or write in terms of representations having an unconscious element is to say that what is represented is at least partially shaped and structured by unconscious aspects of communication. It also concerns non-representational aspects of signification such as formal characteristics, because meaning can be attributed to forms as much as their content (Winnicott 1967). The forms that representations take communicate not only what is consciously known but also what is unconsciously known but cannot be expressed explicitly.

In the case of radio, this means that radio programmes, DJ voices, the physicality of media devices and the time-spaces in which listening takes place can all be attributed with specific meanings.

METHOD

Knowledge of how the unconscious can influence interpretation and perception can be used not only to mitigate researcher bias but to inform our understanding of unconscious cultural processes in representation and communication (Highmore 2007; Price and Cooper 2012). The awareness of the relationality of meaning and knowledge of unconscious processes allows one to take the potential invalidity of subjective interpretation and turn it into a strength, by making full use of our subjectivities as a research instrument (Hollway 2008). Researchers can create a space for their personal unconscious to be heard and understood. This allows researchers to listen and read openly in cultural analysis, so that everything in the text or interview is given equal attention and one can note one's own responses as something valid and distinct from what the text or respondent is representing. This is a conscious process of using one's own imagination and emotions to think more widely

1.   about what research participants and texts are communicating (Hollway 2011)
2.   whilst remaining anchored to knowledge of the historical and social context
3.   in which these experiences are situated. As a group of researchers, we can be
4.   much more aware of how emotional states can influence our interpretation
5.   and analysis. This facilitates using one's own mind as a receptor to what is
6.   communicated (Highmore 2007).
7.   As a psycho-cultural approach involves thinking relationally about subjec-
8.   tivity and meaning, the emotive aspects of texts and their reception denote
9.   specific subjective positions or modes of experience. The formal structure and
10.   characteristics of signs is therefore important. Analysis is based upon identi-
11.   fying relationships between characterization, ideas and emotions. By analys-
12.   ing the characteristics of the objects that emotions are associated with, and
13.   who or which character is expressing the emotion and to whom, we can go
14.   some way to understand the basis of these emotions. The specificity of the
15.   representation, considered in its context alongside other representations, can
16.   contribute to an understanding of the subject–object perceptive relationships
17.   shaping these representations.
18.   The meanings people give to objects, activities and their characteris-
19.   tics can help us to understand the role unconscious thinking-feeling plays
20.   in the reproduction of social life. We can build a detailed picture of social
21.   actors' engagement with radio through probing on questions regarding
22.   what is important to listeners and why and what emotional or psycholog-
23.   ical states accompany their radio listening, for example. This needs to be
24.   combined with detailed information about formative radio or other listening
25.   experiences. Whilst immediate context is dominant in shaping the rational
26.   explanations research participants provide for their radio listening, it is not
27.   necessarily, primarily or solely determinant. We have to invite listeners to
28.   explore their radio consumption with us. There are other contexts that need
29.   to be taken into account, namely individual histories. Individual biographies,
30.   auto-ethnographies and social history can provide the background that aids
31.   our understanding of what is and is not meaningful at any particular point
32.   in time. Recognizing the influence of formative personal life history does
33.   not mean devaluing the role of contemporary social relations and contexts
34.   in influencing the meanings attributed to radio listening. Rather, it means
35.   recognizing the personal history of media usage and sonic experience as a
36.   conditioning component of people's attitudes towards radio, as well as other
37.   audio media. In our research, we need to address and interrogate personal
38.   meaning and then, with historical and sociological knowledge, be able to
39.   place these meanings in a social context.
40.   Each article in this special issue describes and explains some of the
41.   different reasons why radio matters. Karpf and Balick provide two detailed
42.   examples of using object relations theory to describe and understand radio
43.   listening and its effects, whilst the biographical and autobiographical
44.   contributions of Hendy and Lewis provide rich content on the historical
45.   radio production process and radio as a crucial part of everyday life. It is
46.   impossible to adequately address all the issues raised by these articles, so
47.   I have chosen to discuss two key themes: radio as providing ontological
48.   continuity and radio as a tool for self-understanding. The first theme addresses
49.   the embeddedness of radio in everyday life, and the second discusses how
50.   radio can help to produce understanding. How a psycho-cultural approach
51.   could contribute to radio studies will be demonstrated through this
52.   discussion.

4. This general discussion of intimacy does not imply an oversimplification of sonority and listening. I acknowledge that intimacy is a highly varied quality and only one of many different qualities that listeners attribute to radio.

RADIO PROVIDING ONTOLOGICAL CONTINUITY

The articles in this issue demonstrate how listeners use radio to 'hold' themselves, which means using radio as a 'means by which the sense of continuity of being is sustained over time' (Ogden 2007: 77). Given its central role as a medium in both radio and psychoanalysis, Karpf's detailed consideration of the (radio) voice in this issue is extremely useful, because it identifies what distinguishes radio from other media and, at the same time, shows how psychoanalytic research can aid our understanding of why radio matters to people, through an explanation of the role and experience of the voice in our infancy.

As demonstrated in Karpf's exploration of infant observations, sound, along with touch, is our formative, pre-discursive sensual experience. If, as psychoanalytic knowledge claims, formative or primary experiences are fundamental to the formation of subjectivity, it may be fruitful to explore the power of radio as being founded upon this earliest of pre-subjective experiences of sound. It may be the case that radio's power lies in the connection people make, unconsciously, between radio and their earliest and/or most formative experiences of sound, predating their experience of themselves as distinct individuals. If this is the case, the attachments (and also aversions) people have to radio listening can be understood as the product of contemporary radio experience being associated with these experiences of sound in infancy. The use of the voice and culturally specific radio sound can reproduce this primary, trusted intimacy[4] and other effects on this basis. The different types of intimacy people attribute to their radio listening is a result of the particular ways they think and feel about human voices, other sounds and music (as well as their contents), but these effects are also attributable to the disembodiment and conscious representation of the voice as a key aspect of radio programming. The trained radio voice, whether it is as part of a drama series or a familiar presenter, can be experienced as intimately as physical touch when listeners identify with some aspect of it. Creating this intimacy, based on the development of trust, allows radio to provide a symbolic, transitional space for people to think and feel in a much freer and creative way than audio-visual media and embodied voices allow.

The radio voice can 'hold' us emotionally and psychologically (Karpf, this issue, citing Bick [1967] 2002). In holding our *attention* (even if it is a distracted form of attention), the radio can 'hold' the individual together psychically, by creating a sense of continuity of existence through time, in a familiar formation based on previous experiences of listening. This 'holding' feature could be attributed by listeners to a particular programme or radio station playlist, or to a radio voice: its continuity, timbre, intonation and rhythms creating an environment for the listener, which is experienced as holding by creating contentment or an alleviation of everyday anxieties or stress. As Karpf importantly emphasizes, this reassuring quality is doubly determined; listeners can also be held by the regularity of the radio schedule. Against a backdrop of discontinuities and contingencies in everyday life, radio can produce continuity. The constancy of radio programming accompanies aural space-time, making its passing apparent through the changing programme schedule and on-the-hour or half-hour news bulletins and travel reports. The opposition to changes to the schedules of radio programming can be interpreted as evidence of the importance of the continuity function that radio programmes, stations and programme content perform. One of the points that Aaron Balick makes in his article in this issue is applicable to all regularly scheduled programmes,

1. irrespective of the actual content. This concerns the *regularity* of radio shows,
2. which allows them to function as 'good' objects for listeners, that is, as trusted
3. representations of constancy. Here, psychoanalysis is being used to offer a
4. functional explanation for sustained radio listening, which may shed light on
5. why mobile workers and commuters choose specific radio programmes to
6. listen to whilst on the move, as well as the distracted use of radio in domestic
7. and work settings.
8. Lewis' article in this issue is also illuminating with regard to the continuity
9. of everyday life and the self that radio can be used to provide. Lewis' article
10. gives us a clear sense of radio providing a living environment in the form of a
11. soundscape. This is similar to the contemporary notion of the mediascape that
12. invites us to reconsider media as an embedded part of our everyday, living
13. environment. Through such descriptions, the fundamental role that media
14. play in people's lives becomes apparent. Radio would not be able to provide
15. this environment were it not for its consistent presence in some people's lives,
16. despite changes in circumstance and location. Further, it situates us in a social
17. context through which our actions can gain a social meaning. Lewis also
18. points to the connection between the sense of being through an engagement
19. with radio and actions set in the act of remembering. Remembering specific
20. moments of the ontological hold of radio allows us to recall actions, events
21. and places. It is apparent from Lewis' article that radio can provide a narrative
22. structure that makes an individual life coherent and situated, facilitating the
23. expression of intra-psychic, interpersonal and social relationships and their
24. connections. Returning to the present, we can always 'carry on' because radio
25. carries on.
26. Radio sound therefore provides people with an order or structure in their
27. lives in the same way a rhythm section works in a band. Previously in this
28. journal, the connection between feelings and radio listening in everyday life
29. has been described as 'affective rhythms' (Tacchi 2009). This refers to how
30. musical and daily life rhythms are inextricably bound with feeling states or
31. moods. Tacchi's in-depth investigation of over fifty radio listeners attested to
32. the role radio sound plays in the maintenance of a 'dynamic and affective equi-
33. librium' in everyday life because it can 'aid mood creation and maintenance'
34. (Tacchi 2009: 174). A psycho-cultural approach provides a personal and
35. historical dimension to help us explain listeners' sense of having an intimate
36. relationship to radio, which provides them with a feeling of continuity, a conti-
37. nuity of the self through listening, whether attentively or not. Similarly, where
38. this intimacy does not exist, we may be able to find explanations in the mean-
39. ings listeners attribute to different voices and sounds, based on their forma-
40. tive experiences of sound. Here, psychoanalysis provides a means of thinking
41. about radio in terms of the emotional needs of listeners and radio creatives.
42.
43. **REPARATIVE RADIO: THE CONTAINER–CONTAINED**
44.
45. The title of our introduction to this special issue signals one of the thera-
46. peutic meanings attributable to radio and its programmes. Reparation refers
47. to the carrying out of redemptive actions that make people feel better. The
48. reparative 'effects' of radio can take as many forms as there are types of indi-
49. vidual psychology and do not necessarily equate with the explicit act or sense
50. of making reparation or of 'repairing' harm done to others. The container–
51. contained concept (Bion 1962; Ogden 2007) refers to the potential of people
52. to bear each other's and their own difficult emotions with positive social

consequences (Richards 1994) and learn about their relationship to the world as well as themselves. The term 'container' can be confusing because it refers to a dialogic process. A person or, in this case, a radio programme re-articulates difficult issues and their associated feelings (the contained) in a manageable form by virtue of their experience and emotional development. Balick's two illustrative examples in this issue, of his own personal experience of listening to radio and of his counselling role on the phone-in programme *The Surgery with Aled* (BBC1), demonstrate radio's capacity to help us to make sense of difficult personal or social problems, not so much through providing non-prejudicial information and advice but because listeners feel that they can use this radio programme as a container. If listeners imagine that the radio voice or music genre is alleviating their troubles, whether or not it is explicitly engaging with such concerns, then this is a quality listeners are projecting onto radio sound based on their previous experiences. This I would argue is unique to radio, because the same format of programme on television would involve physical display and a greater degree of performativity, which would make the programmes less amenable to this use. Balick makes an important point that reminds us of the politico-economic relations which make this possible: it is the status of the BBC as a public service corporation that enables the production of programmes with a reparative ethos.

Radio can also be used by writers, producers or engineers to manage one's personal affective state, because the craft of radio production involves creating an ordered, coherent and integrated 'object'. In this issue, Hendy suggests how the producer Lance Sieveking was able to find a temporary remedy to the fragmented character of his life by bringing all his experiences together in a radio programme. The radio programmes Sieveking made (and we can reasonably speculate that this is also applicable to other cases) can be thought of as self-made containers for the psychological difficulties he was having (the contained). Sieveking reports how he imagined himself freely flying through the airwaves on this well-crafted and coherent version of himself. Radio provided Sieveking, and potentially countless others, with creative format opportunities with which to both meaningfully engage with others and to manage one's sense of self at the same time. As Hendy suggests, through the making of the programme *Kaleidoscope* and the 'Dramatic Control Panel' he used to orchestrate its live transmission, Sieveking was able to order his own life experience through being able to combine a number of distinct performative elements. In so doing he acknowledged and expressed value for the people (now also his internal mental objects) he had encountered over his life, and who made him the person he was. It was possibly the lack of order or structure to Sieveking's life that produced his appreciation and pleasure for the aeroplane cockpit and then his 'Dramatic Control Panel'. Through the act of orchestration and live transmission, Sieveking experienced a transformation of his internal self from something fragmented to something coherent. The 'Dramatic Control Panel' device perhaps facilitated the fulfilment of an unconscious fantasy of coherency – the *Kaleidoscope* project sustained his continuity of being over time. Here, object relations psychoanalysis is providing an alternative means of understanding radio in terms of the emotional needs of listeners and radio creatives.

Ewart's (2011) study of talkback radio provides another example of radio functioning as container–contained, but this time based on the content of the radio programme. Radio can work for listeners as a 'container' by giving expression to thoughts and feelings in a form that would not otherwise be possible,

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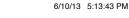41.
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1. for example, by providing opportunities for listeners to think in different ways
2. about subjects or initiating debate on subjects previously not discussed. A
3. separate study of Australian community radio also provides evidence for this in
4. the normalization of the previously taboo issue of mental health through radio
5. programme discussion (Meadows and Foxwell 2011). Radio, like other media,
6. can therefore have 'therapeutic' effects by enabling the projection of fantasies
7. or by deepening one's understanding of sensitive issues.
8.
9. **SUMMARY**
10. The articles in this special issue go some way towards explaining how radio
11. can help to maintain and reproduce everyday life. Karpf's, Lewis' and Balick's
12. articles highlight the relationship between constancy, trust and contentment
13. produced through radio listening. Hendy's article demonstrates the way radio
14. production can be used to engage meaningfully with the self and others at the
15. same time. What I have noted is a positive valuation or attachment to radio
16. in everyday life as reliable and consistent (radio as a positive and constant
17. object). This is a much more complex and general phenomenon than radio
18. producing therapeutic effects in listeners. We can see how communication
19. and engagement through radio are inextricably linked with an everyday proc-
20. ess of self-maintenance. Both require radio to be thought of as a distinct
21. or 'integral object' (Bollas 1995: 87–92). This may seem like a moot point
22. because the objectivity and physicality of a radio is empirically clear. However,
23. communicative and interpretive processes necessarily involve a degree of
24. projecting and introjecting of particular qualities, or ideas, *through* and *into*
25. media texts (Bainbridge 2011). Radio listeners project certain ideas or quali-
26. ties into the programmes they listen to as part of the process of understand-
27. ing, as do programme-makers and presenters in the ways that they address
28. audiences. This is part and parcel of the process of constructing meaning and
29. sense-making. To conclude, I would like to make some suggestions about
30. how a psycho-cultural approach would tackle some of the contemporary
31. developments in material culture and communications technologies that are
32. impacting on radio.
33.
34. **FUTURE PSYCHO-CULTURAL RESEARCH AREAS**
35.
36. Radio has successfully adapted to social changes and new media develop-
37. ments in moving from a geographically bound shared listening experience
38. (the family, the workplace) to an individual and increasingly participatory
39. activity. The predominance of the visual field in other media, including smart-
40. phones and tablets, provides an opportunity for radio to develop along its own
41. trajectory, within existing regulatory and economic constraints, offering some-
42. thing quite distinct within today's mediascape.
43. In the introduction to this special issue, Bainbridge and Yates present
44. some research questions emanating from a psycho-cultural approach, which
45. consider how the affective attachments to radios as material objects may or
46. may not change as a result of the convergence of social processes of media-
47. tion. The multiple devices with which we can now listen to radio are being
48. brought together in new digital radios, which can access radio stations through
49. different, digital means of transmission. These radios are also designed in
50. ways that, rather than communicating digital radio as something new, present
51. radio in the familiar form to which we have become accustomed. This means
52. that human attachment to radio as a physical object can be maintained.

However, the ability to pause and schedule radio listening ourselves, through podcasting and 'listen again' facilities, pulls in an opposite direction, away from radio as a distinct and autonomous 'flow' structuring everyday lives. Rather than being something that can be relied upon, radio can also now be something we choose to listen to at specific times and in specific places with much greater freedom from scheduling. Radio listening is now decoupled from its schedule. The question is, how does this affect the emotional attachments of listeners who use radio to provide constancy? Radio can still be used in this way but it also has the capacity to become something else. For instance, these changes enable radio that functions as companionship (Ewart 2011) to become more available and constant in specific ways. Having greater freedom over how and when we listen to radio will alter the relationship radio listeners have with it.

The ability to listen when we want to and then share what we listen to through web links on social media networks means that radio can also potentially become more of a globally shared phenomenon, transcending our regional situatedness. The increased interactivity of radio, through the use of complementary communicative technologies such as social networking, texting, e-mail and websites, opens up the potential for radio to become more conversational, interactive or dialogic. This means an increase in radio's para-sociality, through extended commentary around and during radio programmes. This will take radio far beyond the discrete form of the talk radio format to a more diverse mode of participation.

So there is a potential for radio to become both increasingly shared *and* individualized. This potentially allows us to use radio in a way that fosters omnipotent and other fantasized relationships to the outside world, because we no longer have to wait for a programme set in a schedule. The otherness of radio is diminished as a result of these technological developments, as radio becomes increasingly subject to our choices. If the capacity to think of radio as a companion or friend, or as something that can be relied upon, is based upon its difference and independence from the self, developments towards increased control and manipulation of it by listeners will diminish this quality, because the radio's status as something distinct with its own determinations will have decreased.

These developments suggest that, in cases where a number of interactive forms exist, we may need to approach the investigation of radio programming, at least from the perspective of the listener, as part of a wider and complementary multi-mediated life or mediascape. This developing, highly mediatized context is taking us beyond form-specific disciplines and increasingly towards an agent-centred, everyday life approach, where various forms of media provide the context for individual and group negotiations of the vicissitudes of daily life.

CONCLUSION

In this special issue convened by the Media and the Inner World research network, we have attempted to address the psycho-cultural dimensions of radio listening and programming. Each article explains or demonstrates why, for listeners and programme-makers, radio has emotional significance. In fact, one of the premises of the psycho-cultural approach I offer here is that there is always an emotional dimension to radio listening and production which should never be excluded from research and analysis because

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1.   it is what meaning hinges upon for listeners and programme-makers. The
2.   second premise is that explanations for the significance of radio listening and
3.   programming need to take into account the unconscious and historical aspects
4.   of these attachments. History is ever present in the way that it conditions the
5.   experience of the contemporary via the unconscious. Radio clearly functions
6.   emotionally, and radio listening and programme-making can be fruitfully
7.   explored through a psycho-cultural approach that listens carefully to radio
8.   listeners' and creatives' thought-feelings rather than just their thoughts.
9.   I hope that this article and the other articles in this issue can, taken
10.   together, begin a discussion about the particularities of radio listening and
11.   programming in a therapeutic or emotionally conscious culture. The Media
12.   and the Inner World research network is interested in the role that radio
13.   plays in reproducing and shaping the affective dimensions of everyday life,
14.   and how, both consciously and unconsciously, it creates spaces for 'thought-
15.   feeling' on a number of social and personal issues, and plays a role in a
16.   number of different emotive and social processes. The expressive and inti-
17.   mate characteristics ascribed to radio mean that radio can play a significant
18.   role as a promoter of the therapeutic ethos: of greater emotional expression,
19.   understanding and concern for others (Richards and Brown 2011). In different
20.   ways, all of the contributions to this special issue demonstrate the personal
21.   and intimate character of radio, whether they are memories that involve radio,
22.   personal problems discussed on radio, learning about one's identity through
23.   radio, the comforting quality of radio or the private sources of creativity in
24.   radio production. We should ask whether these chosen subjects and the
25.   approach to them are themselves a product of living in a therapeutic culture,
26.   with their attention to the emotional and psychological. Object relations
27.   psychoanalysis lends itself to understanding these types of radio experience,
28.   which currently appear to characterize contemporary radio listening practices,
29.   because it is concerned with both personal and group modes of experience
30.   and the meaning we give to that experience. The psycho-cultural approach
31.   presented here is certainly a response to significant changes in public and
32.   political discourse since the early 1990s (Luckhurst 2003). In broadening our
33.   attention to radio practices worldwide, we must be mindful of the differences
34.   in historical and social context between economically advanced, postmodern
35.   nations and developing and underdeveloped political economies. It would be
36.   useful to make comparisons with countries where the therapeutic ethos has
37.   had little or no impact.
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