

PRIVATE TALK IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

PODCASTING AS BROADCAST TALK

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Abstract: With the rise of participatory media such as podcasting consumers are increasingly providers of media content. Consequently, the discourse of individual citizens, rather than only that of media professionals and elite gatekeepers, contributes to the contemporary mediated public sphere. It would seem likely that this discourse would offer social roles and speaking positions that privilege the quotidian and subsequently reconfigure public discourse. This paper uses insights from conversation analysis to study a small sample of podcasts aggregated at *The Podcast Network*. It focuses on the uses of institutional speech forms and expert speaking positions within three examples of pro-am media production. Rather than a direct inversion of elite discourse, these examples demonstrate a complex mixing of the mundane talk of the everyday and the abstract speech of the expert. This paper argues that the significance of participatory media is therefore not merely the empowerment of non-professional or subjugated discourse, but lies in a complication of the naturalised politics of the public sphere.

As the participation of consumers becomes normalised in digital media environments (see Jenkins 2006a; 2006b), media voices are increasingly those of non-professional, although not always non-commercial, producers. The texts generated in Web 2.0 media such as social networking sites, video/photo sharing sites, blogging and podcasting, take the private activities of individuals and render them in a public medium. This is not a new phenomenon.

As Griffen-Foley's (2004) media history indicates, rich engagement of audiences and user-generated content have been integral to the success of print since the late 19th century. Bonner (2003) also argues that the long popularity of various chat/talk programming, and the more recent development of infotainment and Reality TV genres, has centred television in the realm of 'ordinariness'. She uses this term in the sense of the everyday presence of this programming, its use of private individuals as 'talent' and in the performance of 'ordinariness' by hosts and contestants. Talkback, phone-in and request radio also involve mobilisation of private citizen's participation (Hutchby 1991; Montgomery 1991).

Against this backdrop, participatory or Web 2.0 media such as podcasting appear to offer merely more sites in which private, ordinary talk and private, ordinary lives are the basis of mass media communication systems. What differentiates these emerging media forms is that they are generally not bound by the institutional frameworks of corporate broadcast media that privilege actors such as politicians, lobbyists and advocates (Habermas 2006), nor inevitably determined by mass media economics. Indeed, its forms are potentially more varied than the community broadcasting sector where, as Van Vuuren (2006) argues, institutionalised normative processes organise and define valid content. In the broadcast public sphere, the validation of private individuals as speakers is negotiated through the asymmetrical power relations between audience and host role/persona; the institutional infrastructure of the production process; and/or the political economy of media industries. Textual analyses of these media forms, and in particular broadcast talk, reflect this setting and examine how 'ordinary people' are positioned *in relation to* institutionally authorised speakers (for instance Tolson 2001; Thornborrow 2001; Simon-Vandenberg 2004; 2007). This dialectic though does not apply when analysing participatory media in which

institutional gatekeepers are marginalised and where participation is relatively unmediated (see Bruns 2006; 2008; Burgess 2006). The features of talk in this de-institutionalised context would seem likely to offer different speaking positions, and in doing so reconfigure the engagement of ordinary people with the public sphere.

This is an important consideration. The promise of digital media, and in particular the Internet, has long been associated with its ability to reinvigorate the public sphere and democracy itself (see Rheingold 1994; Bruns 2008; Papacharissi 2002; Gimpler 2001; Dahlberg 2001). As Coleman suggests:

An atmosphere of crisis surrounds virtual [mass media] deliberation and indirect representation in the early 21st Century. There is widespread distrust of paternalistic representation (manifested by seemingly remote politicians, parties and political institutions); public disenchantment with virtual deliberation (primarily, the political coverage covered by television and the press); and a post-deferential desire by citizens to be heard and respected (2005: 195).

As podcasting offers the means for direct representation and participation in mediated politics that is vital to liberal democracy, it would be easy to assert that it inherently provides a restorative to the ideal of the public sphere outlined by Habermas (1989a). Like community radio, podcasting's opening of media space for marginalised voices could be viewed as intrinsically contributing to cultural empowerment and cultural citizenship (Forde et al. cited in Van Vuuren 2006). Yet such a blanket declaration does not indicate the emerging form(s) of the digitally mediated public sphere, nor whether it has the necessary qualities to support the continued development of democratic principles. As Burgess (2006) summarises, in an environment where non-professional production is widespread, participation alone does not

ensure the importance of participatory media. She says: ‘The mere fact of productivity in itself is not sufficient grounds for celebration. The question that we ask about “democratic” media participation can no longer be limited to “who gets to speak?” We must also ask “who is heard, and to what end?”’ (2006: 203).

Through the frame of conversation analysis adopted in this study, this question is reframed as ‘what is said, and to what end’ but the point remains. By exploring the speech acts of podcasting hosts, and the social roles they adopt in that discourse, this paper offers insight into the particular qualities of media in this era of participation. Rather than simply assume the (re)-engagement of subaltern expressive forms and actors, this study empirically explores the relationship between the discourse of pro-am producers and pre-existing institutional discursive forms within a small sample of podcasts aggregated under *The Podcast Network* umbrella. Analysis of these hosts’ adoption, adaptation or rejection of powerful speaking positions indicates how participation in public media environments is being performed and in turn, furthers discussion of how that sphere is being reshaped by the technologically enabled participation of private individuals.

Podcasting as de-institutionalised broadcasting

As it is commonly defined, podcasting is audio files offered on demand through syndicated feeds (RSS). It differs from radio and Web-based streaming audio, in that podcasts typically exist in persistent databases. The ephemerality of broadcast signals is replaced by archiving and deferred consumption. Coupled with an astonishing diversity of content fostered by the decline of spectrum scarcity, podcasting offers audiences more choice in programming and scheduling than that offered to a broadcast radio consumer. Most importantly though, the

technology allows consumers to readily become content producers: to participate in media production. In podcasting the costs of production are relatively small so that even commercial podcasts are not required to cater to assumed mass market demands in order to achieve profitability. Although many of the podcasts available through aggregators such as iTunes are commercial radio broadcasts archived on-line - so-called shovelware - there are also many professional-amateurs who produce specifically for the medium and with commercial intent. The diversity of podcasts and podcast talk defeats easy characterisation, but it is nevertheless common for these texts to have many 'radiogenic' features (Berry 2006), borrowing from or remediating (Bolter and Grusin 1999) existing radio formats and structures.

Importantly though, podcasting must still be seen as a form of broadcasting. As Sterne et al. (2008) argue podcasting involves recording and disseminating in a one-to-many or one-to-few form. Secondly, RSS feeds form the basis of a 'push' distribution style akin to that of broadcast media. Podcasting, they argue, is therefore neither a new medium nor a new format. Its key distinction from precursor media is the absence of corporate control, either in the form of market pressures or the professionalisation of hosts. As Sterne et al. say, it is 'not an alternative to broadcasting, but a realisation of broadcasting that ought to exist alongside and compete with other models' (2008). The central issue of podcasting then is not what new forms of communication are enabled by a new medium. Instead it is one of how the social roles of consumer and producer are being performed in a de-institutionalised broadcasting context.

Broadcasters have institutional status and this authorises them as speakers. As Scannell emphasises, broadcast talk is 'a public space in which and from which institutional authority

is maintained and displayed' (1991: 2). This is achieved by broadcasters' control over the nature of the communication and through the imposition of (typically) less powerful social roles on participants such as talkback callers (Scannell 1995: 15). The management of audience/participant behaviours can be performed through institutionalised production processes such as the filtering of callers or studio audience cues (e.g. Kroon Lundell 2009; Ytreberg 2004; Holmes 2004; 2008). Control is also produced and reproduced in the particular discursive and rhetorical features of broadcasting talk. Hosts work to control the conversational floor, both in individual exchanges and longitudinally by mobilising audience perceptions of appropriate roles established through long engagement with programme conventions (Moss and Higgins 1984: 364). Hutchby (1996; 2001) analyses how the sequencing of exchanges between host and listeners during talkback radio typically locates the caller in the vulnerable position of first speaker, according the host the power to oppose or reformulate their speech. These studies show that the para-social interaction between host and listener created through apparently conversational discourse (Ellis 2000; Horton and Wohl 1978/1959) actually occurs within tightly controlled institutional frames. Within this talk, the limited role of audiences and/or everyday citizens is enveloped in the *illusion* of intimacy and direct engagement – the synthetic personalization (Fairclough 2001) – that ultimately perpetuates alienation from the public sphere.

Contrary to the conventional authority attributed to broadcasters, Menduni (2007) has found that young podcast listeners see podcast hosts as peers rather than institutional figures. The power differential between host and listener and the legitimacy of the host role inherent in broadcasting formats is problematised. In this 'democratised' environment, podcasting talk would be expected to reflect a different range of valid speaking positions than those offered

in broadcast media. It may be expected that podcasting hosts would adopt non-institutional forms of speech drawing on the lifeworld, offering a counterpoint to the more abstract discourse of broadcast media experts and that this would form the basis of a renewed public sphere. It is important then to attend to the relative uses of institutional discourse within these podcasts in order to test this assumption.

The Podcast Network

A problem of analysing any media content is to define a sample. In this instance, this problem is extended by the vast array of forms, genres and styles that qualify as podcasting. Given this issue, this paper does not intend to offer a definitive exploration of all podcasting. Instead it offers analysis of three particular examples of demi-professional broadcasters speaking on public issues in the mediated public sphere. The examples used here are collated under the umbrella of *The Podcast Network*, an Australian based commercial podcasting collective (<http://www.thepodcastnetwork.com/>). Its website claims that it was the first podcasting business when launched in February 2005 and allows individual podcasters to work collectively to organise sponsorship and promotional deals. The particular podcasts analysed in this paper were chosen for their internal diversity but all are examples of persuasive discourse referring to political, social or economic activities, with an agenda to inform, educate and/or advocate. They are all clear instances of engagement with public issues. This delineation leaves aside podcasts that have an obvious basis in comedy, entertainment or community building. It may indeed be more interesting to consider the role of these forms of pro-am entertainment in reconfiguring the public sphere but this question is beyond this current study.

They are:

G'Day World (GW) is hosted by Cameron Reilly, CEO of The Podcast Network (<http://gdayworld.thepodcastnetwork.com/>). His podcast often takes the form of interviews with guests but will occasionally consist solely of monologue. The example here - no. 327 *Puny Humans Must Die* - is an example of the latter selected because its distinction from the more typical dialogues of podcasting allows it to exemplify some of the diversity of podcast programming.

The Connections Show (CS) is hosted by Stan Relihan, 'leading Headhunter & Recruiter in Sydney Australia, specialising in IT, Telecommunications & Digital Media, with a global network of contacts & business alliances' (<http://connections.thepodcastnetwork.com/>) and one of LinkedIn's top 50 most connected Power Users. Its consistent format is a formal interview with leading users of Web 2.0 media technologies in a business context. Its declared goal is to put the audience 'ahead of the curve' through discussion of best practice in social networking. In the example analysed here (no. 28), Relihan interviews US based recruiter Rob Bates.

The Father Bob Show (FBS) is based around the figure of Catholic Priest Father Bob Maguire who came to prominence on Australian television in the ABC documentary series *John Safran Vs. God*, a role he has continued as guest on public broadcasting youth radio network station Triple J. He is described on the site as 'an elderly Catholic priest from Melbourne, Australia. He is also an activist, social innovator and TV and radio personality and definitely NOT your typical cleric'

(<http://fatherbob.thepodcastnetwork.com/>)ⁱⁱ. Co-host Michaela acts as producer, directing the flow of content and managing the technology. The episode analysed here is no. 99 *The Town Square*.

In this limited and not necessarily representative data set, there is one example of monologic talk and two examples of dialogic interaction. One of these adopts a formal interview format (CS) while the other is a looser, albeit structured, conversation (FBS). By closely attending to the talk of these programmes it is possible to determine a little of how these hosts configure their relationship to the public sphere.

Mundane talk

For Habermas a key feature of the colonisation of the lifeworld and the subsequent decline of communicative action in the mediated public sphere is ‘an elitist splitting-off of expert cultures from contexts of communicative action in daily life’ (Habermas 1989b: 330).

Discourses that restore the public sphere would be expected then to mobilise forms of talk that are typical of everyday conversation and that encourage dialogic interaction. Hutchby (1991: 119) notes that such ‘mundane’ conversation is designed ‘explicitly for co-participants’ while institutional talk is designed explicitly for overhearers. Everyday interpersonal conversations are marked by what Goffman (1981) refers to as ‘fresh talk’ in which the principal - the one whose views are represented - the author - the one who creates the talk - and the animator - the one speaking - are co-located. Broadcast radio talk was actively developed to assume many features of mundane conversation and fresh talk in recognition of a distracted and always absent audience and the ephemerality of the medium (Scannell 1991). The focus of its content is the ‘small change of the everyday lives of media

personalities (including the station's own staff) or of the audience itself' (Montgomery 1986: 424). A sustained direct address to the listener also sustains the sense of everyday conversation. Handbooks on radio production emphasise formation of conversation with a putative individual audience member, to adapt the mass medium for its typically individualised forms of consumption (e.g. Fleming 2002).

These features of radio/broadcast talk create what Montgomery (1986) refers to as social deixis between presenter and listener. This is enacted in the typical uses of 'interactive' dialogue such as greetings or rhetorical questions (Tolson 2006: 9-10). Following the adjacency-pair principle, in conventional everyday discourse the expression 'Hello and welcome' would generally require a response. By using this same expression at the start of a programme, a radio host is initiating a quasi-interaction with the listener. Even though the average listener is unlikely to overtly respond to this greeting, response-demanding utterances nevertheless establish direct engagement and implicate the listener as part of the discourse (Montgomery 1986: 429-50). Direct address is also commonly achieved by the apparently simple use of the second person pronoun, 'you' (Montgomery 1986). These rhetorical features couple with a focus on everyday events to create the sense that, despite its institutional status, broadcast talk is a mundane conversation between host and listener.

Podcasting conversations

It would seem obvious that podcasting hosts who lack institutional authority would be more likely to use mundane talk. In some sense this is true of the podcasts analysed here. There are certainly false starts, corrections and breakdowns in turn-taking that would be unexpected in professional commercial radio discourse and are more typical of everyday conversation. The

hosts analysed here offer varying degrees of fluency and seamlessness in their delivery, at times appearing stiff and readerly, while at other moments failing to negotiate the in-studio dialogue in a coherent fashion. The impact of extraneous sounds, such as a clicking pen and the acknowledged sound of the host moving dishes in GW (line 16) is also a feature of these podcasts.

However what marks this speech out from the expectations established by professional radio are the extended sequences of non-address to the audience. Goffman (1981) identifies four kinds of listeners:

Addressee: to whom the utterance is addressed

Ratified Recipient: who is ratified to participate in the conversation

Intended Recipient: who is expected to hear and understand

Recipients: anyone who does hear whether this is intended or not

The direct address of radio typically casts the audience as the ratified recipient even if that participation is ultimately illusory (Montgomery 1986). However, in these examples there are extended sequences where the audience address becomes problematic and the audience's easy status as ratified recipient becomes tenuous. The following is an example from *The Father Bob Show*:

| | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 445 | B | So [we'll interview some of those not all of them I think]= |
| 446 | M | [ohhh (0.4) that's interesting (0.6) okay] |
| 447 | B | =this coming week [but you see] |
| 448 | M | [yes] What about these ones [here]= |
| 449 | | [[background noise]] |
| 450 | | =you've [got] |
| 451 | B | [What] are [they] |
| 452 | M | [Ahmm] (0.6) |
| 453 | B | Well we've had them we'd a talk to that lady |
| 454 | M | Bird: [by Sophie Cunningham] |
| 455 | B | [the best selling] (0.2) (So) yeah and the burka in a hard |
| 456 | | place we didn't interview her Sally [Cooper]= |

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 457 | M | [ok] |
| 458 | B | =three years in the [new Afghanistan]= |
| 459 | M | [that looks interesting] |
| 460 | B | =[(would) take it home and read it] |
| 461 | M | [Uhm mmm] Awh [probably don't have time right now] |
| 462 | B | [no you won't you (you and me)] |
| 463 | M | Yeah and I wanna [pinch it off ya] |
| 464 | B | [she pinches] |
| 465 | B | [It'd be pin] |
| 466 | M | [heh heh] heh |

FBS, lines 445-466

Although this exchange creates spatial deixis between hosts and audience by *assuming* co-presence (Montgomery 1986), the lack of contextualising talk describing the books referred to in the 'here' of line 448 leads to some incomprehensibility in this exchange that instead reinforces the distance between hosts and listeners. This couples with the excessive use of news receipts by Michaela (that's interesting; mmm; uh huh) that cast her as the actual recipient of Bob's talk rather than the audience member (Heritage 1985). In particular, Bob's invitation for Michaela to take the book home to read it (line 460) and her honest response (line 461), coupled by their shared joke about stealing the book, marks this as an overheard private conversation, despite its intention to be widely broadcast.

As Montgomery (1986) notes, audiences do not experience radio DJs as if they were talking to themselves. The audience member's assumption is that they are implicated, at the very least, as an intended recipient even if not directly addressed. This is particularly true in monologic discourse such as GW. However the features of deixis that Montgomery associates with monologic talk and which produce the effect of interaction with the audience are mostly absent from this host's talk. In the podcast analysed here Reilly does not address audience members specifically or even as defined groups outside of the expression 'boys and girls' (lines 78-79). He most commonly refers to 'people' in pejorative terms, relying on

audience alignment with the ideological positions he adopts to create connections with the audience. These features can be an effect of the production and distribution technologies of podcasting. In live broadcast radio a shared temporality and often spatiality between production and consumption enables phone-ins, 'shout-outs' and other direct engagements with listeners. The global distribution and archival nature of podcasting on the other hand means that consumption is widely distributed across both space and time. Such interactive features, although they do occur within podcasts, can be corralled to the 'comments' section of the associated blog or website. This encourages the production of talk, such as that in GW, which lacks the features that explicitly incorporate listeners in real time.

In *The Connections Show* listeners are rarely addressed in the 'you' form outside of the introduction and coda and then predominantly by the interviewee in the 'you know' formulation. As the interview subject who is talking to the audience via the interviewer, it is ambiguous whether these 'you knows' address the host or the listener. Nevertheless, assuming the audience hears these as direct address there remains the relative absence of host initiated direct address. This is compounded by the host's few references to the audience in the third person: our listeners (lines 9, 483). This absence of direct address is however typical of the institutional form of the broadcast news interview format where the host performs as a proxy for the audience's interests (Heritage 1985). The text is also marked by a relative absence of conversational news receipts evidenced by long, uninterrupted passages from host and interviewer. This is also typical of formalised interviews in which the host adopts the 'neutral stance of one whose task it is to assist in the production of talk for overhearers' (Heritage 1985: 113). Indeed the show synopsis on the website offers listeners the possibility to 'eavesdrop' on the conversation between host and guest. In this adoption of standard

interview techniques, the audience of CS are positioned as the latent participant expected in broadcast media.

In the 'unprofessional' practices of FBS and GW, the listener's status becomes complicated. He or she remains an intended recipient by virtue of the audio's status as a broadcast text, and enhanced by the very active choice to 'pull' the content, but s/he loses participant status, positioned instead as one of the greater overhearing audience. In CS, the talk adopts the institutionalised rituals of news interviews and incorporates the listener only indirectly. While maintaining some aspects of everyday conversation, contrary to expectations these podcasts are also significantly aligned with institutional talk. It is ironic that is perhaps *because* these hosts lack the institutionalised skills that produce effective quasi-interactive discourse, they produce more institutional talk than their professional colleagues in commercial broadcast media production.

Lay discourse

As non-institutional actors, it may also be expected that the talk of podcasting hosts would reflect many of the features of lay speakers rather than experts. In their analysis of television talk programming, Livingstone and Lunt (1999: 102) describe expert discourse as associated with objectivity, rationality, neutrality and abstraction, as well as fragmentation and alienation. Lay discourse on the other hand is associated with experiential and concrete narratives, subjectivity, particularity and, importantly, authenticity. Authenticity and credibility, they suggest, emerges from the alignment of animator, author and principal within spontaneous displays of self-disclosure (1994: 130). If these podcasts are examples of lay talk, the hosts would rely on the genuineness of personal anecdotes in constructing their

public declarations. Yet, while it is certainly true that these podcasts feature direct experience as a source for content, in various ways each of these hosts works to construct validity for their arguments from institutionalised sources. This occurs both meta-textually and within the talk of the programming itself.

Each host warrants their talk by asserting their qualifications in the show synopsis and typically also in the standardised introduction to each podcast. Relihan asserts his status as a significant user of social networking media. Reilly, who hosts multiple programs on *The Podcast Network*, claims his CEO status, and offers a link to his personal home page that provides evidence of his entrepreneurialism. Father Bob's validity as a speaker is established by his identity as a Catholic priest but also because of his exceptionalism as an identified social activist. As the synopsis reminds us, he is not a typical cleric. As in commercial broadcast media, the meta-textual environment is used to create a persona for the host that validates his or her speaking position (Bonner 2003). In these instances each persona is validated by some kind of institutionally aligned signifier. It is also noteworthy that in their discourse and in their meta-textual environment, both Father Bob and Reilly cite their experience as broadcasters as a source of their authority. This serves as an important justification, boosting their credibility and the validity of their positions in institutional terms.

More interesting though is that the talk within these programmes assumes many features of expert speech rather than lay discourse. Livingstone and Lunt (1994) describe the use of the intimate, personal anecdotes as central to lay speakers' discourse in talk programming. Communicative power develops in the alignment of animator, author and principal. This is in contrast to the role of experts who commonly speak for other experts, and thus have a

distinction between animator and principal in their conversation. While author and animator, the principal of Father Bob's speech acts is the Catholic Church and/or social activists generally. His public, institutional status renders his anecdotes within the register of expert discourse as he is already sanctioned to speak for others in the offline world. For instance, as he discusses solutions to the problems of drug trafficking (lines 130-312) he implicitly draws upon his social work on the streets of Sydney to provide an otherwise absent validity for his proposed solutions. Teased out by Michaela's questioning and directing of the narrative, Bob's personal statements are persistently extrapolated into broad social lessons.

Despite using ostensibly personal anecdotes, both Father Bob and Reilly tend to summarise the opinions and actions of others as source material. For instance, Reilly cites his interview with Noam Chomsky (lines 80-105) as a source for opinion on the concept of freedom of speech. In the following example, Reilly offers firstly an authenticating personal narrative providing contextualising and trivial information that sets the scene for his purchase of a particular book.

- 19 Reilly to you: I'm reading a great book (0.5) .t at the moment that I
 20 actually picked up in my local Lifeline store I was off getting a
 21 haircut the other day had to walk through a Lifeline store to get
 22 from the car park (1.0) [to: the]
 23 [((background noise))]
 24 Reilly ah hairdressing store and on the way back there was a second
 25 hand book ah place [uh in the]
 26 [((background noise))]
 27 Reilly Life\line store and I was flicking through saw this great book
 28 which I'd kinda see:n I guess in ah airports a few years ago .t
 29 (0.2) but ah didn't know anything about it picked it up read the
 30 back thought that looks good and I'm absolutely enjoying it it's
 31 called Shanta:ram s h a n t a r a m by Gregory David Roberts
 32 (0.5) [it's: ah came out in]
 33 [((rustling of papers))]
 34 Reilly two thousand a:nd th:ree [now]
 35 [((rustling of papers))]

36 Reilly uh this guy is ahm (0.7) .t from Melbourne (0.7) [in Australia]
37 [(background noise)]
38 Reilly and it's it's an amazing story basically ah: (0.4) he was: ahm
39 (0.3) a heroin addict (0.2) who: wah: committed a couple of
40 robberies was in prison to twenty odd years in ah (hi-) maximum
41 security Pentridge I guess in nineteen seventy eight (0.5) .t but he
42 broke out a year or two later an:d ah went on the run (0.3) and
43 this book is basically about his years living in Bombay it's it's ah
GW, lines 19-43

In the initial passage (lines 19-30) Reilly is clearly principal, author and animator of the discussion. Rather than merely inform the audience of his book purchase he instead offers an experiential narrative grounded in the pragmatics of his own experience. However, he then goes on to report an abstract description of the book's content and ideologies (lines 31-43) that extends well beyond the extract offered here. This citation of others as validating support or central focus of the narrative is a common feature of the talk in this particular podcast. In these instances though, Reilly is no longer serving as the principal of his own talk. He is instead assuming the role of an expert who is authorised to summarise the work of others.

Reilly also commonly produces the assumed voice of others to work as clearly wrong-headed counterpoints to his own thinking. He commonly discusses the kinds of statements 'you get from people' or ventriloquises supposed ideas. In the following example discussing the nature of brain activity, he alternates between his own voice and the voice of 'people', marked in the audio by tonal shifts.

| | | |
|-----|--------|--|
| 422 | Reilly | years (0.4) good mate (0.7) and then they say stuff to me like |
| 423 | | whu we'll get (0.2) talking about (0.6) <u>thinking</u> in the <u>brain</u> |
| 424 | | people will say well:: ya know I don't think emotions reside in |
| 425 | | the brain I think they reside in the hear:t or something like that |
| 426 | | and I'll be like <u>what</u> (0.7) heh heh the hearts a <u>m:uscle</u> for |
| 427 | | pumping <u>blood</u> what makes you <u>think</u> that (0.7) it's anything else |
| 428 | | other than that well: I've just got this feeling that there's mo:re |
| 429 | | to:: thinking: than: (0.7) brain activity (0.4) <u>really</u> well w:hat |
| 430 | | evidence do you have to support that well: none: it's just a you |
| 431 | | know people just <u>believe</u> crazy stuff it's (a it's) idea that I was |

GW, lines 422-431

In animating a putative speaker, and by creating a distance between principal and animator, Reilly adopts features of institutional, expert discourse. This distance is especially significant given his typically absolute negation of the alternate view and the consequent exceptionalism attributed to his own perspective. Moreover, his constant valorisation of abstract reasoning (see lines 429-30 in this example) associates Reilly with an expert register rather than the performance of lay talk.

Using a different strategy Relihan takes an expert stance by aligning his own practices with those of his guests who are warranted by their institutional status established in meta-textual and textual discourse.

| | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 76 | Bates | Ahm (uh eh) <u>not</u> s:o much I'm <u>sure</u> : that it's <u>possible</u> that <u>clients</u> |
| 77 | | might do relevant <u>searches</u> : trying to find service providers in the |
| 78 | | category that <u>I am</u> in of executive search in LinkedIn and that |
| 79 | | they might find something you know about <u>me</u> : and as a result |
| 80 | | reach <u>out</u> to me: but ultimately: I've gotta win: any <u>business</u> with |
| 81 | | a client based on a reputation: or reference ability: an:d track |
| 82 | | record of being able to deliver a service that they're looking for |
| 83 | | my presence in LinkedIn isn't what wins business |
| 84 | Relihan | No I'd imagine so cos I picked up one or two pieces of business |
| 85 | | and a few enquiries but ultimately the end of it networking is still |
| 86 | | how one picks that business up it's just ah more in a physical |
| 87 | | tangible form than it is in an online form |

CS, lines 76-87

As is typical in the interview genre, he sympathetically reformulates his interviewee's recounted experience through a personal anecdote. The ambiguity of the 'we' of the host/interviewee relationship and the universal 'we' regularly appears in these reformulations. In this example, Relihan provides a quick shift from a description of his own experience to a general principle with the move from 'I' (line 84) to 'one' (line 86), thereby eliding his own experience into a universal axiom.

This capacity to speak not only the words of others, but ‘for the people’, is a common feature of the expert status offered to broadcasters and in the talk of institutionalised experts generally. As Goffman argues, in radio talk

the announcer typically allows the (typically unwarranted) impression to be formed that he [sic] himself is the author of his script, usually his words and tone imply that he is speaking not merely in his name, but for wider principals, such as the station, the sponsor, right-thinking people, Americans-at-large, and so forth, he himself being merely a small composite part of a larger whole (1981: 226).

Tolson (2006) also describes a particular feature of celebrity anecdotalisation where the star shifts footing from speaking as principal, animator and author to that where s/he mouths the views of others. These kinds of speech acts perform the celebrity’s right to speak for everyone else for they are ‘exemplary human beings’. In using his own experience as the reformulation of the interviewee’s experience, Relihan is asserting a similar universality or general applicability of his experience, and in doing so, is claiming for himself status as an exceptional example. However lay discourse does not speak of the general in this way, but only the individual and specific (Livingstone and Lunt 1994: 127). In choosing this formulation, Relihan is moving beyond mundane, lay discourse, adopting a complex position where his personal narratives, grounded in experience are simultaneously abstracted and ‘made expert’.

Thus the three hosts discussed here position themselves in relation to institutional frameworks in various but complex ways. Like the talkback callers studied by Thornborrow (2001), these hosts work to warrant their talk to justify their intervention in public discourse. Unlike Thornborrow’s talkback callers though, this is not always in a manner localised to the

speech context. What is offered is not only the ‘witnessing’ of the talk caller described by Hutchby (2001) which is dependent entirely on first hand experience. These podcasters also draw upon abstract and generalised institutionalised expertise established within the meta-textual environment and through their discursive structures. These hosts do sustain the use of personal anecdotes and narratives typical of fresh talk, yet reduce the authenticity of their performance by claiming some of the authorisation of institutional talk to bolster their position. They are, therefore, not merely performing the function of lay speakers, recounting meaningful or, depending on the epistemological orientation, unsupported talk. Instead they are also taking the powerful stance of the expert and adopting many conventions of broadcast media.

Complicating the public sphere

What is interesting about these examples is the complicated layering of both lay/mundane talk with expert/institutional forms. Entry into the public sphere, or in a network of public sphericules (Bruns 2008), is here enveloped in a complex interplay of communicative forms and subjective positionings. On one hand, these hosts are challenging the symbolic power of media systems through their non-institutionalised speech, but in perpetuating the systemic valorisation of abstract expertise, they sustain the validity of institutionalised structures and the privileging of existing elite discourses. Even though these hosts may be considered atypical in their overt declarations of expertise, they nevertheless remain part of the broad spectrum of texts that constitute podcasting and participatory media generally. These podcasts show that the relationship between established media practices and consumer production is not always a clear re-engagement of the lifeworld, but can be messy and inconsistent.

Although it is difficult to generalise from such a small sample, there are nevertheless two key points that may be drawn from this analysis. The first is that the participation of ordinary citizens in media talk cannot be assessed as a simple inversion of dominant paradigms, whether this is defined as a restoration or debasement of the public sphere. For instance, Mehl (2005) describes media sites that include private voices and where self-presentation and lay discourse is valorised as the 'public sphere of exhibition'. This sphere, he says, is not modelled on rational discussion. In these contexts, public deliberation

tends to be presented in the form of confrontation, a comparison, an evaluation of expressions, feelings, inclinations and preferences judged in the light of the plausibility of certain choices and forms of behaviour rather than in the light of the intellectual or normative relevance of a point of view or an engagement.... We now have stories, narratives and displays of different experiences instead of intellectual arguments from opposite points of view. Demonstration is replaced by exhibition or display (2005: 24).

For Mehl, the subsequent problem of this form is that it reduces debate. Arguments can be refuted or challenged, but comparisons of experience have an internal validity that renders them difficult to counter. He says: 'Objections can only be formulated in terms of pseudo-objections, such as: "I did not react in the same way when I had a similar experience."' A story, which acts as an argument, becomes genuinely impossible to challenge' (2005: 25).

Thus, the reliance on private, personal stories within the public sphere exclude the debate and deliberation essential to its functioning.

However in these examples the continued use of public expertise frameworks complicates the notion that 'merely' private stories and narcissistic self-expression are on offer in the

participatory public sphere. Certainly there is much talk within these podcasts and within the broader podcasting environment that is based purely on the particular and experiential. But within these examples at least the warranting of speech ensures that critics do have a position from which to counter. Debate and critical engagement is made possible, even if only a rejection of a host's expert status and legitimating frameworks. Inasmuch as these examples form part of the texture of the podcasting genre, its content cannot all be dismissed as a 'trivialisation of intellectual discourse' (Mehl 2005), just as it cannot be read as a restoration of the deliberative component of the public sphere. The examples studied here indicate a messy and inconsistent quality to the speech acts within the participatory public sphere, which in turn presupposes a more complex effect on the nature of public debate than suggested by Mehl's narrative.

This leads to the second related conclusion. Like the 'emotional public sphere' of the *Jerry Springer Show* (Lunt and Stenner 2005), these podcasts the emergence of public discourse that is potentially a source for a new politics of the everyday. They serve as another site for the mediation of public expression and deliberation that usefully complicates and politicises the definition of valid public expression (Carpignano et al. 1990). Gamson (1999) describes how the reversals of authority that privilege overt emotionality within talk programming have enabled the entry of non-traditional speakers into public discourse. Livingstone and Lunt draw similar conclusions.

Insofar as the audience discussion programme escapes Habermas' fears about the institutionalization of public discussion, this is not because the programmes achieve some ideal form of communication, such as the critical discussion, but rather, because the programmes act communicatively as a forum for the expression of multiple voices

or subject positions, and in particular, because they attempt to confront established power with the lived experience of ordinary people (1994: 160).

While accepting the basic principle, this analysis complicates this position. The politicisation evidenced in these particular podcasts is not merely about the possibilities of representation and/or valorisation of non-elite discourses. Rather, in claiming the privilege of institutionalised talk forms in conjunction with those of private discourse these non-institutionalised actors add another layer of complexity to the assumed binary power inversion outlined by Livingstone and Lunt. From the evidence presented here, it would be erroneous to claim that marginal discourse is inherently empowered within the medium of podcasting but it would be just as false to assert that the lifeworld remains entirely dominated by systemic, institutional discourses. These podcasts show evidence of a complex renegotiation and re-organisation of the regimes of dominance within the public sphere. Like talk shows, these podcasts 'do not so much exemplify the adulteration of an ideal deliberative public sphere as demonstrate the ways public space is built and changed through active cultural battles' (Gamson 1999: 198). That these podcasts make their demonstration through mobilising discursive forms previously aligned with elite discourse rather than as wholly subaltern expressive forms does not diminish their capacity to illuminate and problematise the nature of public discourse mediated through participatory technologies.

It is true that these podcasts, and many other forms of participatory media, do not provide direct evidence of a renewed engagement with democratic deliberation. In these examples there is a variable engagement with features traditionally associated with the Habermasian ideal of public discourse. But these podcasts nevertheless indicate that this participation may

provide entry to a contested space where the allocation of cultural resources is under debate. In such a space, the separation of system and lifeworld is re-organised and the nature of the public sphere becomes redefined. Perhaps the important contribution of participatory media then is not the direct renewal of the public sphere but a refocussing on its contestable and contested nature that may lead to a new configuration of valid public discourse. For those able to participate in new media, what may be at stake is participation in that contestation and a subsequent role within the shifting theatre of public discourse.

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ⁱ I am indebted to my undergraduate research assistant Jonathan Bannon for his transcription of the audio data and his insightful analyses.

ⁱⁱ At the time of final editing, the show synopsis of the site had been amended to: ‘Join Father Bob Maguire and Michaela for a discussion about charity and social activism’.