

Broadcasting the Archive

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Abstract. The Web has affected broadcasting in several ways, but we argue that the biggest effect is about to come: “opening the archive” makes all the ‘goods’ of a broadcaster available, not just ‘the schedule’ of goods that have traditionally been broadcast. This paper reviews the development of audiovisual technologies and their business consequences, including a simple conceptual framework for media and business categories. We also review the definition and development of economic ‘goods’, as reminders of the concepts of value and public value. We conclude with a BBC proposition around a general *digital public space*. Heritage content is currently held in bondage by economic constraints (particularly copyright) that need to be transcended to release the greater value of “the goods” held in national archives and other heritage institutions.

Keywords: Archive, heritage, broadcasting, commons, public value, digital public space.

1. The Origins of Broadcasting

Audiovisual technology is about moving the surrogate of a sensory experience across time and space. Starting in the 1870’s, the Bell telephone allowed sound transmission across great distances, though only in real time. Very soon afterwards, sound was recorded to be replayed later, and elsewhere. Images had been recorded forty years before, but “moving images” were a technology of the 1890s – when the roll-film developed by George Eastman was used in the Edison Kinetograph, and projected to an audience using the Lumière Cinématographe.

- **The resulting industries of telephony, recorded sound and cinema were not just *influenced* by the basic technology, they were *defined* by that technology.**

Broadcasting is more complex, because the concept of a broadcast preceded radio. Early wireless telegraphy in the 1890s carried weather and other information from coastal transmitting stations to ships at sea (at least, to those ships that purchased the Marconi equipment). There were also (in the same decade) subscription telephone systems for listening to concerts¹. The first needed no wires, but carried Morse, not

¹ Theatrephone <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%A9%C3%A2trophone>

audio. The second carried audio but needed wires, as something like a conference call or multicast – but not broadcast. Radio had no wires, carried actual voice and music instead of Morse, and was broadcast from a transmitter to any number of receivers. When a famous concert or speech was made into a wax cylinder recording and commercially sold, we don't call that broadcasting – though when a famous event was filmed (without sound!) and shown in cinemas, that experience was considered 'the news' (or at least, the newsreel). Production, distribution and viewing of newsreels were never called broadcasting, though BBC television news followed a newsreel format² until 1954³, when it added a presenter to form 'news and newsreels'.

2. Broadcasting Today

Broadcasting uses technology so that a great many people can hear and see as if in another place and time (or both). The essence of broadcast is reaching 'a great many people': a phone call is not a broadcast. Once one would have said 'reaching a great many people *at one time*' – but broadcasters can no longer say when material will be viewed. Content is still sent to 'a great many homes' at one time, but viewing can happen much later. The content can be stored at the receiving end (a functionality that has been widespread for 30 years, since the advent of VHS tape recording), or the content can be stored by the broadcaster for later access (using Internet technology) – a catch-up service eg iPlayer.

The change from simultaneous to (potentially) delayed viewing is caused by the technology itself. VHS recorders and DVD recorders and now home hard drives and catch-up services are technology that allows new behaviour.

- **New behaviour appears in response to new technology. It cannot occur the other way around. Technology defines the possible.**

What is possible now? Broadcasting began as a real-time tie between a studio and a listener, and later a viewer. The tie to a specific time at the receiving end has already been lost, but broadcasting continues to define itself by a tie to, if not real time, then at least specific times at the origination end. The broadcast schedule defines what the broadcaster is doing, and large audience figures continue to respond, in real time, to this schedule. For cinema and recorded music the tie to specific events is loose: a small town may get a 'latest release' months after circulation starts, and people may buy an album years after first release. Book publishing is even less connected to specific events: publishers have release dates, but with the rare exception of a new Harry Potter novel, book releases are known to a precision of something like a quarter of a year.

It should be noted that a broadcaster's presence on the Internet has no tie to real time, at either end.

² An example: 1951 BBC Newsreel: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/aerialjourneys/5304.shtml>

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbcnews/spl/hi/history/noflash/html/1950s.stm> The newsreel element of TV news persisted (in the BBC) up to the late 1950s.

2.1. Sorting out the Possibilities

The point of the review of the origins of broadcasting has been to show that technology defines what can be done, and so defines what people do (namely, they use that technology).

There are now many kinds of media, many relevant technologies – and many ways to describe the complex ‘media space’. The following diagram tries to describe only the essentials.

Table 1. Four categories of media.

Media	one-to-one	one-to-many
real time	telephony	broadcasting
non real time	messaging: post, email, SMS	publishing

Publishing in this categorisation includes many things: cinema, recorded music and Internet as well as conventional book, newspaper and periodical publishing.

There is much ‘new technology’ that is not mentioned at all in this classification: mobile reception, hand-held devices, home media storage and networks, electronic replacements for large sectors of print publication (e-journals, e-books, even whole e-libraries), smart phones, apps, e-book readers and on and on. They are all there, jostling for attention -- but not changing the classification, or even expanding the fundamental possibilities: a printed novel is “mobile”, and has been for centuries.

The basic contention of this paper is that there *is* a new technical possibility: **public access to all that a broadcaster has produced**, not just the current schedule or the last week’s catch-up service. This technology arises from:

1. **a combination of broadband connections to home and mobile devices;**
2. **a general move to online access to content, creating pressure for access to all of a public-service broadcaster’s content and simultaneously creating pressure for changes in rights and rights management to allow that access.**

However this possibility opens within the general category of publishing, and outside of the historical definition of broadcasting.

3. The Future of Broadcasting: losing real time, gaining all time

There is really only one thing left for broadcasting to lose: the schedule. So long (and only so long) as there is transmission of content to some form of wide distribution, at set times, then broadcasters will still be broadcasting.

What has broadcasting to gain? **Viewers who are not looking at content in real time can be looking at content over all time.** The totality of broadcast content – the accumulation of everything that has been preserved from the beginning of broadcasting – can become available to the user. Whether ‘the schedule’ remains or not, a broadcaster can point (somehow) to all its own past output, the sum of all past schedules. Exactly as the importance of the schedule diminishes, the importance of

the *accumulation of content* increases: as we cease to watch what has been arranged, at the times arranged – so we develop the capacity to follow a trajectory of our own making. We will do this, because the technology makes it possible.

In this view, accessing what once was called *broadcast content* will not be a choice between scheduled content and archived content. There is no need to choose between real-time and archived access, for people who have cut their real-time ties, who do not operate in real time. For these people, it is all one uniform body of content, spread along a time dimension but not tied to real time access.

In this view, a broadcaster makes content and viewers select content – and that’s it. Book publishing works this way. Rights need to be changed, but that process has already started as a requirement for ‘opening the archive’. The new kind of rights agreement should be seen as more like a book-publishing agreement: the broadcaster produces or procures an item of content, and then publishes it (on demand) forever.

For public-service broadcaster, the *goods* they produce are in a special category:

- the content is of national and international significance,
- often (legislation varies across Europe) the broadcaster is its own *library of deposit*,
- the broadcaster needs to maintain permanent URLs to reach the content,
- the broadcaster needs to collect user-generated information and support social networks formed around the content.

All of that happens around the “totality of the broadcaster’s output”, the running integral of the broadcast schedules – an accumulation of content that historically was called ‘the archive’ but which is not the archive of the broadcaster, it defines the broadcaster: the sum of its goods.

4. Goods and Public Goods

4.1. Goods and Value

This paper is for a conference on Virtual Goods, where the emphasis is on the word ‘virtual’ – by contrast with more traditional goods, like buttons or hats or cars. The word ‘goods’ also deserves attention, because it is not synonymous with *thing* or *object*. The word ‘goods’ comes from an association between a thing (or a service) and a value – a ‘good’ has value to people: it can be sold in a marketplace because of its value. Note that the argument does not run the other way: it is not the marketplace – the price – that defines the value. The object is a ‘good’ because of an inherent value.

4.2. Public Goods

Not everything that people want and need can be reduced to a standard *good*, virtual or otherwise. There is a category of *public goods*, defined as:

“Things that can be consumed by everybody in a society, or nobody at all. They have three characteristics. They are:

- *non-rival – one person consuming them does not stop another person consuming them;*
- *non-excludable – if one person can consume them, it is impossible to stop another person consuming them;*
- *non-rejectable – people cannot choose not to consume them even if they want to.*

Examples include clean air, a national defence system and the judiciary. The combination of non-rivalry and non-excludability means that it can be hard to get people to pay to consume them, so they might not be provided at all if left to MARKET FORCES. Thus public goods are regarded as an example of MARKET FAILURE, and in most countries they are provided at least in part by GOVERNMENT and paid for through compulsory taxation.”⁴

Broadcasting clearly satisfies the first two characteristics, and it is a common complaint about media in general that we can’t get away from it, so broadcasting has at least strong elements of being *non-rejectable*.

In consequence, most citizens of European countries are faced with paying a licence-fee or tax to support *public broadcasting*: a public good like clean air. In return, the purpose of broadcasting⁵ is to “inform, educate and entertain”.

Broadcast is an overall public good, but the edifice of broadcasting is built up, piece by piece, by the individual programmes produced and transmitted. Now, for the first time ever, the totality of these programmes – the “entire good” – can (so far as technology goes) be made available through Internet access to digitized broadcast archives.

The major problem with opening broadcast archives is the difference between a good (of the ordinary sort, virtual or otherwise) and a public good. Somehow the overall public good represented by broadcasting is not, generally, seen as a sum of individual public goods. Instead, the archive contents are seen as commercial objects – ie ordinary goods, with rights holders vying to get their share of the market value of these goods.

5. The Digital Public Space

The argument for a digital public space – a place where heritage content can flourish outside a commercial context – begins with recognising that the individual items in a broadcast archive should also be seen as ‘little public goods’. Each individual programme (and each tape or optical disc or file in an archive) should inherit the attribute or status or class of *public good* from public service broadcasting as a whole. A similar argument covers the contents of other institutions (museums,

⁴ <http://www.economist.com/research/economics/alphabetic.cfm?term=publicgoods#publicgoods>

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/purpose/>

libraries, film institutes and many more) that are also paid for by the public. The fact that the public pays (totally or in part) for these institutions is what defines them as public goods, as per the definition quoted above. Like clean air, these non-rival, non-excludable institutions are public goods just because they have not been provided by market forces – but instead have been provided as exceptions to market forces.

In the UK, the BBC and partner institutions are promoting a formal Digital Public Space to protect the public value of these heritage (and related) goods, so that their public value will not be undermined or denied by considerations of market value.

The effort has been described by Gerhardt and Kaufman⁶ as: *“a wider landscape in which the major cultural collections funded and maintained at public expense are at last opening up a form of access. The idea of a Digital Public Space, conceived by the BBC as a place in which public collections of film, video, sound, and other digitised objects can collectively overcome rights and access barriers, is a welcome recognition that this new marketplace has first to be organised and established. The Digital Public Space is building on the work of JISC and the Strategic Content Alliance.”*

The BBC has several activities in this area: *“Arts and Cultural partnerships: A History of the World in 100 Objects is a collaboration between the BBC, the British Museum and hundreds of other museums across the UK. The BBC and The Henry Moore Foundation partnership digitised television documentaries on Henry Moore, which were also shared with Tate Britain for its own Henry Moore exhibition. A major partnership has been signed with The Public Catalogue Foundation to help deliver the art of the nation online to the public.*

*These are all examples of the digital public space partnerships which the BBC is seeking to set up with organisations looking for ways to reach new audiences, promote their physical spaces and display online material from their collections.”*⁷

The heart of the matter is copyright and commercial interests. There has been enormous discussion of copyright in the last decade, and this paper does not seek to add to it. The single outstanding characteristic of the Digital Public Space is that it is a mechanism to release public value by separating it from the commercial considerations associated with (the very definition of) ordinary goods.

According to the developer of the concept, Tony Ageh⁸: *“This notion of the public space allows content to be amphibious rather than only commercial or public sector. It would allow the web to be as commercial as it needs to be, but structured in a way that you couldn't retrospectively apply to the web.”* It would, he claims, stimulate the creative economy, drive digital literacy and maximise public value. *The Digital Public Space idea is as brilliant as it is ambitious. “As a nation, we need to decide that we are going to create an environment where every one of our citizens can get value from these technologies,” he says. “The BBC should facilitate this, but it is an opportunity for these technologies to remind all our national institutions what they were trying to achieve in the first place.”*

⁶ Kaufman, Gerhardt http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/5/6/4/%7B564236F6-5E29-42C0-AE58-401E966147A2%7Dfstt_summary_final.pdf

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/future/partnerships.shtml>

⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/nov/01/tony-ageh-interview-bbc-archive>

The critical issue is creating a non-commercial space. This is a new market, but not a commercial market. It is specifically for goods that have public value, to liberate them from a commercial market that does not recognize public value.

The Internet facilitates the Digital Public Space. The Internet can be used to create Virtual Worlds, and Virtual Goods – but it can also liberate *virtuous goods*. Like clean air, these goods have dimensions of value that economists have long recognized (under the name public goods) – but economists have also recognized that standard market forces do not recognise or release this value.

The UK-led (and BBC-led) Digital Public Space is an effort to build a new arena (agora!) for these goods. Public sector and heritage institutions will create this space, public-service broadcasters will release their archives into this space (thereby becoming *public service publishers*, or some such), items that are otherwise unknown will become known – generating commercial opportunities and ways for copyright holders to make money, but outside the Digital Public Space, and the public value of this content will, at long last, be released to the public.