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**BUILDING THE DIGITAL COMMONS: PUBLIC
BROADCASTING IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET**

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It's hard to realise, now that television has become a commodity, subject to market forces...that there was a time when many of us saw it as a public facility...a place where ideas could be presented in all sorts of ways...an arena of democratic exchange in the interest of all. Joan Bakewell (Programme presenter. Started work at the BBC in 1954 now retired) (2004:182).

'It is time to retrieve, or perhaps to reinvent the public domain'. David Marquand (Political theorist. Previously Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford) (2004:5).

Over the last two decades debates on television have been dominated by a swelling chorus intoning the last rites for public service broadcasting and pressing for a fully commercialised communications environment. They argue that organisations and regulatory systems created in an age of spectrum scarcity have been rendered redundant by the increasing abundance of channels. They label the compulsory licence fee as an unacceptable curb on individual consumer choice and see public broadcasting's monopoly entitlement to public funding as conferring unfair advantages in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Faced with this relentless attack many senior broadcasters have come to share Joan Bakewell's feeling that the game is indeed up. They lament the passing of the ideals to which they devoted their lives and agree with Robert James Walker that 'The old dreams were good

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dreams; they didn't work out, but I'm glad I had them' (quoted in Tracey 1998:pxvii).

I want to argue that this pessimism is misplaced and that Public Service Broadcasting is a project whose time has finally come both philosophically and practically. As David Marquand has argued so eloquently, in an age of increasing individualisation and commercialism we need more than ever to reinvent the public domain. Because broadcasting is central to contemporary cultural life, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, rethinking public service is the key to this project. Pursuing it requires us to jettison our familiar analogue maps and draw up a new digital chart. We have to stop thinking of public broadcasting as a stand-alone organisation and see it as the principal node in an emerging network of public and civil initiatives that taken together, provide the basis for new shared cultural space, a digital commons, that can help forge new communal connections and stand against the continual pressure for enclosure coming from commercial interests on the one hand and the new moral essentialism on the other.

The core rationale for public service broadcasting lies in its commitment to providing the cultural resources required for full citizenship. From the outset however both the key terms in this formulation- 'citizenship' and 'culture' - have been continually contested. The sources of this struggle lie in the combination of circumstances that shaped broadcasting's initial emergence as a mass medium and the resilience of the settlements arrived at then.

Re-Imagined Landscapes

In the years immediately following World war I broadcasting moved from being a patchwork of mostly small scale initiatives, many of them amateur, and became the domain of professional practices centralised in bureaucratic organisations. The age of the radio ham was over. Broadcasting was now a professionalised distribution system delivering a daily schedule of programming to audiences. In planning what

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to broadcast and how to address their listeners however, broadcasters had to decide how to position themselves in relation to two profound social shifts; the emergence of a mass consumer system and the arrival of mass democracy.

The first Model T motor car rolled off Henry Ford's new assembly line in 1913 extending the mobile privatisation first introduced by the bicycle. 1916, saw the launch of the automatic washing machine and the opening of Clarence Saunders Piggly Wiggly store in Memphis, the first grocery outlet to allow shoppers to browse the shelves themselves rather than have a clerk make up their order. A new imaginative landscape was being assembled in which domestic drudgery would be abolished and personal choice extended. The home would cease to be the focus of continual worry about making ends meet and become an arena of self expression and social display. The labour of maintaining basic living standards would give way to the pleasures of constructing lifestyles. The task of selling this vision of personal liberation was delegated to the emerging advertising industry. The swelling ranks of copywriters and image engineers were charged with maintaining the mass demand needed to keep the new system of mass production running at full tilt. The more memorably advertising campaigns promoted their clients' products the more they also helped cement the master ideology of consumerism that underpinned the new economic system. Consumerism sold secular salvation. It promised that the trials and tribulations of everyday life -imperfect bodies, loneliness, failed relationships- could be swept away by the healing touch of commodities - skin cream, peppermint toothpaste, shampoo, a fashionable new outfit, a phonograph. No one was excluded. Everyone could be born again. In the mansions of Selfridges and Sears Roebuck there were many rooms. All that was required was an act of individual choice followed by a purchase.

By encouraging people to buy their way out of the social contract, consumerism acted as a powerful solvent of support for collective solutions. Why worry about the condition of public transport if you could drive everywhere? For the majority of Europeans recovering from the devastation of war and many Americans faced with

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the Great Depression however, the new consumer landscape remained mostly out of reach until after World War II. Consequently, moves to extend socialised improvements to living standards and life chances commanded high levels of popular support. They lay at the heart of the new politics of mass participation.

The years after 1918 saw women win the right to vote in a number of major European countries that had previously resisted change, though progress was uneven and bitterly contested to the end. In Britain full adult suffrage was finally introduced in 1928, making it plausible to talk of a genuine mass democracy for the first time. As well as being consumers, making personal choices in the marketplace, people were now citizens with the right to a say in the construction of collective life and the laws and rules that governed it. Thin conceptions of citizenship identified it primarily with voting in local and national elections. Thicker conceptions saw it as the right to participate fully in every area of communal life and help shape the forms they might take in the future. In this extended conception active citizenship embraced both the self organised creativity of local choirs and neighbourhood street festivals and mass demonstrations against corporate malpractice and government failure. For adherents of thin conceptions these kinds of collective activities smacked of crowd behaviour and conjured up discomfiting images of mobs running riot. They identified 'good citizens' as sovereign individuals diligently informing themselves about current affairs, rationally evaluating the competing policy packages put forward by the major political parties, and soberly registering their preference in the secrecy of the ballot box. But both sides recognised that active citizenship required a range of resources that supported participation on a basis of equity and dignity.

Some of these resources were clearly material - a life long income, decent housing, access to healthcare, safe public space, a working public transport system, reasonable holidays and free time. Securing these was the cornerstone of struggles to extend the state's responsibilities for welfare. But equally clearly others were

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cultural. We can identify access to information, knowledge, deliberation, representation, and participation as core cultural rights.

● *Information Rights.* Firstly, citizens are entitled to comprehensive and disinterested information about current events and conditions and about the actions, motivations and plans of all those institutions -both governmental and corporate- with significant power over their life chances and living conditions.

● *Knowledge Rights.* Secondly, they require access to the full range of interpretive frameworks that convert raw information into explanations, identify causes, highlight unnoticed links and connections, clarify how particular events and decisions will impact on every lives and choices, and lay out the full range of options for intervention and change.

● *Deliberative Rights.* Thirdly, since in complex societies there are always multiple interpretations and proposals in play, active citizenship also requires access to deliberative fora where contending positions can be tested against the available evidence, their ethical presuppositions questioned, and their likely consequences for the quality of public life rigorously evaluated.

As the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, has argued so forcefully, principled deliberation is the defining feature of modern democracy and the main business of all those social spaces where 'issues connected with the practice of the state' are discussed, a collective arena he dubs, 'the political public sphere' (Habermas, 1989:231). He also identifies a parallel space, the 'literary public sphere', centred on popular fiction, where readers develop self knowledge and empathy by imagining themselves in other people's shoes, but he sees this as entirely separate from the political public sphere and therefore marginal to the making of citizenship. Interestingly, this argument has been strongly echoed in market oriented policy documents on broadcasting. The influential British report on broadcast finance issued by a committee chaired by the neo-liberal economist Professor Alan Peacock

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is typical. Having recommended that all BBC services should be sold on subscription they admit that in a competitive multi channel market some 'types of programmes' that contribute essential resources for citizenship 'are unlikely to be commercially self-supporting in the view of broadcasting entrepreneurs' and will therefore continue to require public subsidy (Home Office 1986:133). Their list, which is headed by news, current affairs and documentaries, also includes 'critical and controversial programmes, covering everything from the appraisal of commercial products to politics, ideology, philosophy and religion' (op cit: 127). Two things follow from this division of broadcast labour. Firstly, it is no longer the business of commercial broadcasters to provide the full range of information, knowledge and deliberation. Secondly, public service broadcasting should focus on these areas and not compete with commercial operators in the provision of popular fiction, comedy or entertainment. Not surprisingly, both arguments have been strongly promoted by commercial channels wishing to jettison their public service obligations and reduce the competitive reach of public service organisations.

This position assumes that citizens already know their own intentions, desires and preferences and simply require access to information and interpretive frameworks in order to barter with others effectively. However, as Noelle McAfee points out, if citizens have already adopted fully formed positions why bother to engage in deliberation as opposed to debate. Debate involves defending a position against questioning and attack but deliberation 'means being willing to release one's own view and adopt another' (McAfee 2000:190). In order to make the imaginatively leaps this requires and deal fairly and justly with other people's claims however we first need to ask 'What is it like to be someone else, to be particular kinds of other people? How does it come about that these people can be like that?' (Mepham 1990:60). Because fiction, drama, and comedy offer greater flexibility in exploring these questions they remain absolutely central to public service broadcasting's core rationale.

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● *Representation Rights.* In assessing any cultural intervention's contribution to advancing citizenship we immediately run up against questions of representation in both the senses that term carries in English, as an array of cultural forms and genres and a system of social delegation. If we accept that the right to have one's experiences, beliefs and aspirations depicted in their full complexity and in ways that encourage empathy and insight rather than rejection and contempt is a basic cultural entitlement of citizenship, we need to ask: ' Whose lives and opinions are represented in the major arenas of public culture and who is excluded or marginalized? 'and 'How do particular cultural forms organise ways of talking about and looking at events and situations? Do they privilege certain viewpoints and employ familiar stereotypes or deconstruct them?' But we also need to ask questions about the social organisation of cultural expression, about who is entitled to speak for or about others, about what responsibilities they owe to the people whose views and hopes they claim to articulate, and about the rights of reply and redress open to those who feel misrepresented.

● *Participation Rights.* These questions in turn raise issues of participation. For reasons I will explore presently, public service broadcasting has traditionally constructed its audiences primarily as listeners rather than speakers or performers, spectators rather than image-makers. Over the last two decades however this sense of exclusion has generated increasing demands from viewers and listeners for more participation in the making of screened culture and the organisation of public debate.

Recent struggles over representation and participation are rooted in long standing tensions in public broadcasting's organisation and sense of its social mission. The key question in the context of the present argument is whether these contradictions can now be overcome.

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A Contradictory Project

During the century long struggle for the universal franchise a series of publicly funded cultural initiatives were launched offering facilities that were either free or heavily subsidised. They included adult education courses, public libraries, galleries, concerts and museums. One of their major aims was to encourage responsible citizenship. Public service broadcasting extended and generalised this project but it was shot through from the outset by contradictions around its core conceptions of professionalism, education, and nation building.

As with all public institutions public broadcasting was seen as the specialised domain of a new class of professionals motivated by 'pride in a job well done or a sense of civic duty' rather than the search for profits (Marquand 2004:1-2) and claiming the autonomy to exercise their professional judgements as they saw fit. This insistence on keeping the state at arm's length provided a valuable bulwark against government attempts to commandeer the airwaves in the service of national security and led to continuing skirmishing over the ways radical dissent, civil unrest and external conflicts were reported and explained. At the same time it excluded sustained contributions from vernacular sources on the grounds that they were amateurish and failed to meet professional standards. When ordinary people spoke they did so under conditions determined by the programme makers, as vox pops, applauding audiences, game show contestants, or illustrations of social problems. This asymmetric relation was written into the very fabric of the institution. When the BBC moved to its new headquarters in Broadcasting House at the top of Regent Street, it commissioned a sculpture from the controversial artist, Eric Gill, to place over the main door. The piece showed Prospero and Ariel from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Programme planners and makers were to be the magicians of the new medium, filling the isle with noises of their own invention, ably assisted by the expertise of the technical and support staff.

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The careful channelling of expression from below was reinforced by public broadcasting's avowedly educational project which set out to make the 'best that had been thought and said' as widely available as possible. On the one hand this was a liberating intervention. By abolishing the constraints imposed by locality and making Mozart's music, Shakespeare's plays and Einstein's ideas readily available and accessible it expanded the imaginative horizons of countless listeners and viewers. On the other hand, by spelling culture with a capital 'C' and identifying it with the work of artists and experts who had passed into the official cannon it reinforced the devaluation of vernacular creativity and lay knowledge. This hierarchy of judgement was institutionalised in mixed programming strategies. By serialising a Dickens novel directly after a variety show audiences were encouraged to climb the great ladder of culture, to move from darkness to enlightenment. Within this general project national cultural and, by extension, Western European culture, was assigned a privileged position.

Following the Bolshevik's seizure of power in Russia and the failure of allied intervention in support of the counter revolution, European governments were haunted by the spectre of popular insurrection, a fear made tangible by widespread labour unrest and regional discontent. In response they set out to displace sectional loyalties and establish the nation as the primary source of social identity. As the sole national broadcaster the BBC played a particularly active role in this symbolic nationalisation inventing or revivifying a series of shared rituals of solidarity and celebration - the monarch's Christmas Day address, the jingoism on the last night of the Promenade Concerts, broadcasting the chimes of Big Ben at Westminster, relaying the football Cup Final and annual Oxford and Cambridge boat race on the Thames. But there was another motivation behind this promotion of national culture.

With its cultural industries undamaged by war and increasingly integrated into the emerging mass marketing system the 1920s saw the United States emerge as the dominant global force in popular entertainment aggressively promoting the

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pleasures and comforts of consumption. Faced with the relentless rise of Hollywood and the world wide success of jazz and American popular music, a complex which an internal BBC inquiry presented as an octopus extending its tentacles into every corner of popular leisure, public broadcasters had an added incentive to promote national cultural production that spoke to specifically national conditions and issues. As one campaign slogan for public television in Canada put it, the choice was between 'the state or the United States'. Since public broadcasting was supported out of compulsory taxation and American material was popular it could not be ignored altogether, but its presence could be strictly controlled through quotas, and its limitation signalled by its placing and presentation. As Christopher Stone, an early BBC expert on dance music explained, although he felt obliged to include at least one 'effort from America' in his weekly show, he was careful to introduce a 'faint scoff in my voice when I introduce them' (quoted in Camporesi 2000:126-7).

This emphasis on the centrality of national expression had the positive effect of assigning significant resources to national production and opening up communicative spaces for contending visions of shifting national conditions and structures of feeling. At the same time, particularly in Britain, it also reinforced an island mentality and confirmed a sense of national exceptionalism. Consequently, when the rest of the world was considered it was seen either through the prism of empire or the dualism of democracy's contest with communism.

In common with all institutional formations then, the original British conception of public service broadcasting which has served as a major reference point around the world, was simultaneously both facilitating and constraining, carefully managed and vigorously contested.

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Contested Representations

Struggles to open public service broadcasting to a wider range of viewpoints, voices and creative visions increasingly came to centre on issue of representation and participation. From the mid 1960s onwards, a succession of social constituencies who felt themselves to be marginalized or misrepresented by mainstream programming pressed for greater access and the right to speak for themselves. They included women's groups, gay groups, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and increasingly numbers of citizens who belonged to no social movement but were tired of being taken for granted, typified, and talked down to. Public broadcasters responded by developing a range of new programme forms based around lay comment and everyday lives. They addressed contemporary issues through participatory talk shows and citizens juries. They produced documentaries that did away with directive voice-of god commentaries and used unobtrusive filming to get as close as possible to the grounded textures of life and talk in families, workplaces and institutions. And they handed cameras over to audience members so they could film their own lives and present their own preoccupations in ways determined by them, drawing on the professionals for advice but retaining editorial control. At a structural level demands for representation and participation generated new channels, notably Channel 4 in Britain and SBS in Australia, expressly designed to supplement existing provision by catering to constituencies that mainstream public service channels had neglected. This movement to extend rights of representation and participation however coincided with mounting pressure from commercial interests to extend the reach of private broadcasting.

Marketisation

Marketisation has been promoted by two major policy interventions. Liberalisation has introduced competition into broadcast markets that were previously either public monopolies (as in most western European countries) or duopolies with

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strong public service regulation, as in Britain. In 1980 only two European countries, Italy and the United Kingdom, had dual systems with public service and commercial channels in competition. The rest remained public monopolies, except for Luxembourg which had always operated a purely private system. By 1997 only Austria, Ireland and Switzerland still had public monopolies and all three were actively preparing for the arrival of commercial channels. As well as massively enlarging their sphere of action private television interests also succeeded in winning more space for manoeuvre by pressing for the rules governing ownership and advertising to be relaxed and getting the underlying purpose of regulation redefined. As the European Commission's Director General for Competition recently explained, 'the emphasis has shifted away from protection of some broadly defined 'public interest' ... towards opening up markets, ensuring free and fair competition and promoting the interests of consumers' (Lowe 2004:1). In this formulation the requirements of full citizenship, though ritually evoked, trail some way behind.

In an increasingly competitive environment commercial players argue ever more vocally that they cannot be expected to bear the losses involved in continuing to provide public service programming and that this task should be the sole responsibility of publicly funded organisations. This argument will certainly prevail which means that the future of public service broadcasting is now more important than ever.

Digital Interventions

In considering this future we need to start by acknowledging that public broadcasters will have to move from analogue to digital technologies since governments are intent on assigning more spectrum space to other purposes. Some have already fixed a date for 'switching-off' analogue channels. This transition has the potential to alter broadcasting's relations with its operating environment and its audiences in fundamental ways. Some of these possibilities are already in play. A

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number of public broadcasters have taken advantage of the extra capacity released by digital compression to launch new digital channels catering to specific constituencies, offer enlarged space for current affairs, documentary and arts programming, or provide contexts where innovative ideas in comedy and drama can be tried out. The BBC's new digital service for pre-school children CBeebies, and its BBC 3 and 4 channels, are cases in point. Public broadcasters have also been actively experimenting with the interactive capacities of digital technologies. The BBC for example has recently invited viewers to select the Olympic events they wish to watch, register how they want the plot of a radio play to develop, follow up news stories by pulling down additional information from on screen menus, and take part in on screen activities linked to particular programmes after transmission has ended. These innovations are still being experimented with but it is already clear that they can extend public broadcasting's scope and give viewers more choices. However, they do not alter the fundamental power relations between broadcasters and their audiences. It remains essentially a top-down system. Viewers are still responding to options orchestrated by programme makers. They may have an increasingly flexible menu to choose from but they are still not allowed in the kitchen. The Internet, and more particularly the World Wide Web, on the other hand, holds out the prospect of addressing public broadcasting's historic limitations in more fundamental ways.

Since the explosive growth of the Net has tempted otherwise cautious observers to talk in utopian terms however it is important to note that it presents problems as well as possibilities. Three are particularly important for my argument here.

Firstly, access to the Internet through personal computers remains highly stratified by income, age and education with substantial numbers of poorer households, elderly people and educational drop-outs facing the prospect of permanent exclusion. Even if they achieve basic connectivity the always on /always there high speed broadband links needed to access the full range of Internet facilities will remain out of reach.

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Secondly, the Internet's progressive slicing of interests into ever thinner, more specialised, segments, mirrors the increasing individualisation of television viewing produced by the explosion of niche cable and satellite channels and the arrival of personal video recorders. Taken together these technologies make it entirely possible to only watch what one already enjoys and to only encounter opinions one already agrees with. In a situation where world views are increasingly polarised and talking across differences on a basis of knowledge and respect is more vital than ever to a working deliberative system, this hollowing out of collective space present a major challenge to democratic culture.

Thirdly, as with every other branch of the cultural industries the Internet has become a major arena of corporate activity. The increasing individualisation of consumption over the last decade has been accompanied by an unprecedented consolidation of media ownership producing global multi-media corporation intent on redeveloping cyberspace as retail real estate.

That is the bad news. The good news is that there are two powerful counter tendencies to this process of commodification, one based on a revived philosophy of public goods the other grounded in a moral economy of gift giving governed by norms of reciprocity.

The Open Net

Off-air broadcasting has always been classified as a public good in the lexicon of economics, since unlike a commodity such as a cinema seat, access is potentially universal and everyone can enjoy it at the same time without interfering with anyone else. As we have seen however, from the outset public broadcasting was also thought out of as a 'public good' in a more general, philosophical sense, as an activity that aimed to contribute to the quality of communal life and the development of democratic culture. Although other publicly funded institutions shared this ideal the limits imposed on them by space and location prevented them

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from matching broadcasting's universality. By abolishing these physical constraints the Internet allows public cultural institutions to become public goods in the full sense for the first time. Many have been quick to take advantage. Public libraries and archives are digitalising their holdings and galleries and museums are making their entire collections available on line. Where holdings are publicly owned or gifted to the public universalising access present no problems.

It does however present difficulties for public universities since traditionally lectures and publications have been considered as intellectual property owned by the staff who produced them, or in some revised formulations, by the institution that provided the paid time and facilities that made the work possible. Increasingly however university academics are coming to embrace the counter philosophy of the Creative Commons which employs private rights to create public goods by persuading rights holders to allow their material to be freely accessed and used providing it is for non commercial purposes. On this basis the faculty at MIT has recently agreed to post all their lectures on the Net for anyone to read and use.

This extension of the philosophy of public goods has been accompanied by an upsurge of intellectual and creative production on the Internet based on horizontal networks of peer-to-peer exchange regulated by an ethic of reciprocity. I post something that I think might interest or benefit you .I do not ask for any payment but I do expect that you, in turn, will post material that might be useful to me. It is variant of the moral economy of the gift adapted for virtual transactions. One of the best examples of this unwritten social contract in action is Wikipedia, the largest encyclopaedia in world history compiled entirely from voluntary contributions. This system of collaborative exchange is also producing novel forms of news and commentary. OhMyNews in South Korea currently has 15,000 'citizen reporters' filing stories, observations and opinions. 'The result is a rich mix of views and sources-some contradictory, some with unexpected connections or insights-regarding any particular issue' (Uricchio 2004:153).

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On Screen and On line

Broadcasters too have moved on-line and developed a web presence. Many sites established by commercial stations are confined to breaking news, programming listings, promotional sites for particular shows, electronic stores selling merchandise spun off from programmes, and message boards where viewers can post comments. Their aim is to cement customer loyalty by incorporating audiences more fully into the channel's imagined community. In an increasingly competitive market this makes sound business sense. Public broadcasters have to compete for audiences too but they have to do more and some are already very active in exploring the possibilities.

The BBC's public web site is currently one of the most trusted and widely used Internet sites in Europe. It has achieved this position by exploring ways the Internet can extend public broadcasting's core mission of providing cultural resources for thick citizenship.

Information and knowledge rights have been extended by supporting current affairs and documentary programmes with extensive internet resources. Anyone interested in the issues raised or wanting to know more can now go to the Corporation's site and find a range of additional material and links to other relevant sources and organisations.

Deliberative rights have been extended by setting up a wide range of message boards where viewers and listeners can discuss recent programmes and current issues. Many of these include expert and lay opinion in the same discursive space, During Britain's national debate on genetically modified crops for example the BBC dedicated its science bulletin board to discussion of the topic.

Rights of participation have been extended by moving programmes dropped from the on-air schedules to the web. The BBC's Video Nation project, which invites viewers to make short video presentations on an aspect of their lives or opinions, is

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a good example. Making it available on line has the added advantage of extending the contributions' active life since they are now stored in an electronic archive that can be accessed at any time.

Plans for a much more ambitious system of electronic archiving and retrieval are now emerging as the cornerstone of the BBC strategy for the future. It is already possible to access and play a wide range of radio and television programmes broadcast during the last week. But the recently announced Creative Archive project goes much further. Drawing on the copyright model developed by creative commons licensing it aims to put the Corporation's entire programme archive on line and make it available for non commercial uses. This is arguably the most important innovation in public service provision since its original foundation. By allowing viewers not only to watch programmes again but to re-edit them or incorporate segments into their own productions it offers a massive stimulus to vernacular creativity.

This intervention accelerates a shift in public broadcasting's working model of culture that has been gathering momentum for some time as increasing demands for greater participation have battered away at the doors of commissioning editors and channel heads. The result has been a move away from the privileged emphasis on a 'culture in common' whose values and priorities are framed by designated experts and artists towards a greater recognition of the democratic value of a common culture 'which is continuously remade and redefined by the collective practice of its members' (Eagleton 2000:119).

Taken together these developments point to a major redefinition of public broadcasting's role. It will remain a key centre for original production but programmes will cease to be discrete events and become potential starting point for a variety of activities and involvements. In future the range and organisation of the on line resources public broadcasters provides will be as important as the quality

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and diversity of its programming in evaluating its contribution to cultural citizenship.

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Developing these resources requires us to abandon our old analogue maps of the cultural industries which depicted a series of stand alone institutions separated by incompatible technologies and compile a digital chart showing public broadcasting as the central node in a new network of public and civil institutions that together make up the digital commons, a linked space defined by its shared refusal of commercial enclosure and its commitment to free and universal access, reciprocity, and collaborative activity. This space is potentially global in scope. By linking national institutions and local initiatives across borders it makes the resources of the best resourced equally available to the hardest pressed. As the institution best placed to address the current problems with Internet outlined earlier, public broadcasting has a pivotal role to play in building this digital commons.

Current patterns of exclusion from the Internet are produced not only by the costs of personal computing and connectivity but by feelings of incompetence, symbolic exclusion, and the irrelevance of what is currently on offer (see Murdock and Golding 2004). Because television is a ubiquitous, familiar, and well used presence in everyday life it is less likely to bump up against these symbolic barriers to participation.

Public broadcasting also has the capacity to counter fragmentation. Employing programmes, whether watched in real-time or retrieved on line, to kick-start on-line activities maintains at least a minimal base of shared experience. In addition, web surfing has the capacity to counter the self enclosure of zapping and personalised video recorders. Although mixed programming now often takes second place to crafting distinctive channel identities, a user entering the

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broadcaster's web site to pursue a particular interest will encounter a wide range of other possibilities, some of which they may be tempted to follow up.

Finally public broadcasters have the opportunity to capitalise on the high levels of public trust they enjoy and become the portals of choice for anyone wanting not to be sold to and to know that the links listed are to organisations and movements that subscribe to the core principles underpinning the digital commons.

At the same time, the project of reconstructing public service broadcasting as the pivot of the digital commons faces formidable obstacles. It entails substantial additional costs to broadcasters and, at least initially, to viewers. Moving the modal point of entry to the Internet from personal computers to digital television sets also cuts across the ambitions of Bill Gates and other leading computer corporations who see streamed audio and video services as central to their future profitability.

But the stakes are too high not to fight these battles and win. In a world increasingly divided by ethnic, national and religious fundamentalism promoting uncrossable lines between 'them' and 'us', the righteous and the ungodly, citizens and migrants, and united only by consumerism and the superficial and disposable communalities of shared style, fostering a sense of citizenship that is cosmopolitan, values diversity and committed to addressing problems through deliberation rather than force, is more vital than ever. This is an enormous task but also an unrivalled opportunity.

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