



Oliveira, M.; Portela, P. & Santos, L.A. (eds.) (2012)  
*Radio Evolution: Conference Proceedings*  
September, 14-16, 2011, Braga, University of Minho: Communication and Society Research Centre  
ISBN 978-989-97244-9-5

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## Doing Radio in the Age of Facebook

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### **Abstract:**

This paper begins with the hypothesis that social media are the prosecution of radio by other means; its aim will be to focus on the changes that radio has undergone since it started to mix with social media, in particular Facebook. How deeply have such changes affected the relationship between radio producers and listeners? The paper will analyse the case of three Italian radio programmes which have developed an intense interaction with their listeners through Facebook. We will conduct a quantitative observation of the social media activity of these programmes over an entire week and show the different social media strategies implemented by the selected programmes, as well as their different dramaturgical relations with the listeners.

**Keywords:** radio, Facebook, social media

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### **Doing radio in the age of Facebook**

Seventy years passed from the publication of Arnheim's essay on radio to the invention of Facebook. In that famous book, *Radio. An Art of Sound*, Arnheim noted radio's distinctive characteristic, the sightless nature of listening, the mutual invisibility between transmitter and receiver. As he wrote, "radio organises the world for the ear". Arnheim was the first to praise radio specifically for its aural language, and to recognise the "blindness" of radio listening as an advantage rather than an impairment, a way to eschew the limitations of vision. A flight not from images themselves, but from the mechanisms of visual perception. Since Arnheim's times, however, many things have changed and new inventions have been introduced: the transistor, the telephone, the Internet, broadband, satellites, the iPod, blogs and SNS (social networking service). Each one of these implants onto the radio machine's body have generated a new hybrid and modified listening patterns. While it is still possible to tune into a radio set in the kitchen, as was the case in Arnheim's time, this is nowadays a residual form of listening. Radio listening still maintains some elements of blindness, but the way in which we now experience this medium is no longer totally disembodied and immaterial.

Technological implants on the body of the radio medium, from the telephone to SNS, can also be read as a coming-of-age novel, in which we follow the main character, the public, through the various stages of its growth and development. With SNS the novel ends: the main character has passed puberty. The presence of the public within radio programmes goes from zero grade – the telephone – which implies only the presence of a voice, invisible and disembodied, to the most advanced stage so far – Facebook – in which the public has a face, a name, a personal space for discussion (the Wall), a bio-cultural profile (the Info section), a collective intelligence (the Home Page), a general sentiment (Arvidsson 2011). It is the end of the public as a mass that is blind (it cannot see the source of the sound), invisible (it cannot be seen by the transmitter), passive (it cannot take part in the conversation) and insensitive (it cannot manifest its emotions towards the speaker). The implant of SNS on the

body of the radio medium renders the immaterial capital made up by the listeners public and tangible. While until recently the audience was invisible to radio and was confined to its private sphere except in the case of phone calls during a programme, today listeners linked to the online profile of a radio programme are no longer invisible or private, and the same goes for their opinions and emotions. And if emotions and opinions are no longer invisible or private, they are measurable. To this end Arvidsson claims that "the remediation of social relations that has accompanied the rise of consumer culture has effectively managed to transform the nature of affect, from something private or at least located in small interaction systems, to something that acquires an objective existence as a value creating 'substance' in the public domain. Social media have taken this process one step further" (Arvidsson 2011).

The new communications model that derives from the short-circuit between radio and social media is a hybrid model, partly still broadcast, partly already networked. Radio is still a one-to-many means of communication. However, telephone already made it partly a one-to-one medium (phone interview) and many-to-one (open mic, phone talk radio); to this we have to add SNS, which are at once a one-to-one (chat), one-to-many (tweets, FB notes or posts), many-to-many (FB Home, Twitter hashtags), many-to-one (FB comments) kind of media. The mix between radio and SNS considerably modifies both the vertical relation between the speaker/presenter and the public, and the horizontal relation between each listener. Both types of relation are approaching a dynamic typical of peer-to-peer culture. When a programme's presenter and one of his or her listeners become friends on FB they establish a vertical and bi-directional relation: both can navigate on each other's profile, both can watch each other's online performance and at the same time be an actor in it. They can both enact two types of performance, public and private: they can comment posts on each other's walls, send each other private messages or communicate by chat in real time. For the first time in the history of radio the speaker and the listener can easily communicate privately, far from the ears of other listeners, "off-air". This gives rise to a "backstage" behaviour between presenter and listener that was previously unimaginable.

At the same time, the relation between listeners is similarly changing. Fans of a radio programme can establish links online, exchange public comments on the programme's wall, express more or less appreciation for specific contents, exchange contents on their personal walls, write each other private messages or chat with each other. The radio's public has never been so publicised. While before SNS the concept of radio public was a purely abstract entity, which could be understood sociologically and analysed statistically, today this community is no longer only an imagined one (Anderson 1993). People who listen frequently to a radio programme and are its fans on FB have the opportunity, for the first time, to see and recognise each other, to communicate, to create new links while bypassing the centre, in other words the radio programme itself. While a radio public is an invisible group of people who are not linked together, the SNS audience of a radio programme is instead a visible group of people/nodes in a network, connected by links of variable intensity which in some cases can produce strong links that transcend the network.

Radio is increasingly becoming an aggregator, a filter for the abundance of information, useful especially for the non-prosumer listeners, who do not publish videos and have no time to explore friends' profiles, which are a true goldmine to discover new trends. The radio author's job thus resembles more and more that of a translator, of someone who connects two worlds – niches and mass culture – by delving into niches and re-emerging with a little treasure trove that can then be used productively. The producer's function in the age of Facebook is thus to drag contents emerging from small islands, small communities and to translate and adapt them for the public of large continents, transforming them into mass culture. This is how the value production process in radio works in the era of SNS: listeners enact their tastes online, the radio author (increasingly a producer, as Benjamin predicted in his 1934 essay *The author as Producer*) re-interprets and re-elaborates them, providing the audience with a dramaturgically constructed listening experience in which it finds its contents mixed together. Listeners comment and supply new material to the community of listeners/producers so that the process can start again.

Radio flow's production process in the Facebook era is similar to that of mineral processing. The listeners/producers are the miners extracting the raw mineral (content in the shape of a brilliant comment, a note, a videoclip, an excerpt of a film taken from YouTube, a brand new Soundcloud song, a link to an article, etc.) that is then refined, processed, elaborated by the author/producer. The author/producer adds value to the content discovered by the listeners/producers by giving a dramaturgical shape to that content, by linking it to a complex architecture of sense based on dramaturgical rules (the radio programme). The author/speaker and the listeners are both producers of the programme: they cooperate, through SNS, on the design and the production of radio contents. As Castells noted, "Networks de-centre performance and share decision-making" (Castells 2000:12). Radio makers (authors/presenters/producers) and radio listeners, once they are connected through SNS, belong to the same horizontal and multipolar network. On the SNS stage everyone, radio makers and listeners alike, is able to perform, to take part, to alternatively play the role of the actor (contributing with contents) and of the audience (contributing with comments and liking). As Benjamin hoped, the boundaries between authors and "readers" are, once and for all, broken down. How much the listeners take part in this production process is still controlled by radio makers and this has to be taken into account when designing a new radio or cross media format.

### Results of a comparative study on the use of social media by three Italian successful radio programmes.

In the second part of this paper we will present the results of a comparative study on the use of social networks by three Italian radio programmes. The observation of the Facebook fan page of the three programmes took place in the week between 1 and 6 March 2011. The programmes analysed - *Caterpillar* (Rai Radio2, Italian public broadcaster) *RaiTunes* (Rai Radio2, Italian public broadcaster) and *Io Sono Qui* (Radio24 Il Sole24Ore, commercial news&talk radio) – have been chosen for two reasons: for their innovative model of interaction with social media and for the difference in composition of their online public, as shown by the following table:

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	5-54	Over 55
Caterpillar	2.76	8	24	31	24	9.6
Rai Tunes	1.3	11.2	47	26.8	7.8	2.52
Io Sono Qui	2.3	9.9	31	35	14.5	5.2

Table 1: Distribution (percentage) according to age group of the Facebook public of the programmes analysed. Source: Facebook internal statistics

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	5-54	Over 55
Europe: active users	12.9	35.6	27.9	13.7	5.2	4.5

Table 2: Distribution (percentage) according to age group of active Facebook users in Europe. Source: Facebook 2011

The three programmes analysed have different Facebook publics in terms of age group, but these are very similar to each programme's radio target. *RaiTunes* is a programme with a younger audience, while the Facebook public of *Caterpillar* and *Io Sono Qui* is in line with the average public of the radio stations that air them. Compared to the average age of active Facebook users in Europe (table 2), active users on the programmes' FB profiles are on average older: this figure is influenced by the average age of the radio public, which is notoriously higher than that of the social media public.

*Case history #1: RaiTunes*

**Broadcaster:** Radio2 Rai [www.radio2.rai.it](http://www.radio2.rai.it) (3.781.000 listeners per day - source: Audiradio 2009; 1.647.503 Podcasts download in February 2011 – Source: RAI)

**Programme history:** On air since September 2010

**Genre:** night music show

**Tags:** new sounds, urban, DJ culture, music, night show, electronic.

**Schedule:** Monday-Friday, 22.40-00.00

RaiTunes is an evening music show presented by one of the most well-known and experienced DJs and presenters on Italian radio, Alessio Bertallot, who recently (2010) moved from an important commercial radio network to the public broadcaster. His name is a benchmark in music radio formats and his voice represents the real brand of the programme. The music format (see below) is addressed to urban listeners and a young audience. Music is mixed live by DJ Frankie B, an international music producer and sound designer well-known on the club scene. The presenter, himself a musician and DJ, frequently performs with Frankie B. The programme was chosen because of its great appeal to younger generations (this is in fact the most important show addressed to them), for its cross media approach and for its considerable and innovative use of social media. Once or twice a week (usually Tuesdays and Thursdays) the playlist is user-generated, that is it is put together by the community of listeners together with the presenter. The selection is made during the day before the evening show on the Facebook fan page of the programme. The presenter plays a classic DJ game with the listeners, the “back-to-back”: he chooses the first song posting a You Tube video of it on FB and asks the listeners/FB fans to reply with another link to the video of a suitable song to follow his first choice, and so on, until the playlist is completed.

### **Web and social networks**

**Website:** <http://www.rai.it/dl/raitunes/page/Page-4982bb61-776f-4734-b6b9d80cb1c28740.html>

**Facebook profile:** <http://www.facebook.com/AlessioBertallot>

**Facebook stats** (as of 05/03/2011): 21.549 “likes” (started in October 2010)

**Twitter profile:** <http://twitter.com/bertallot>

Twitter stats: (as of 05/03/2011): 768 followers, 1183 tweets

YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Bertallot>

### **Social media activity and audience participation**

The Facebook fan page of the programme is a lively space, where the programme keeps on living when the presenter switches off the microphone. The fans are young and extremely active. They post an average of 60 to 100 You Tube links to music videos every day (even on weekends). The page is constantly updated throughout the day. Fans keep on posting at every hour, day and night. The FB wall continually changes, showing the general sentiment of the listeners/fans. It resembles a collective stream of consciousness. Music video posting is the real glue of the RaiTunes community. The listeners of the show are used to music shows, are used to go to concerts and they behave like a concert audience. The fans who post on the wall demonstrate a wide musical knowledge, perfectly matching the musical choice of the presenter. On the wall we can witness a collective process of “fine tuning” of the general taste of the RaiTunes audience.

Before and after the show the fans keep on posting music and making comments about it, but when the show begins something special happens: they stop posting music and start listening to the programme, leaving the FB page open on their computers. During the 80 minutes of the show the FB page is updated almost every minute with comments and questions about the music played by the DJ. In those 80 minutes people post an

average of 60 to 80 comments on the wall, like a concert audience chatting about what it is listening to. Every day the same dynamic takes place: when the programme begins, fans stop posting videos (it is like when a concert begins and the audience falls silent): they agree to enter into another dimension, the spectacular one. The change of behaviour on the FB fan page marks a ritual passage. Presenter and listeners recognise that they belong to the same tribe and taking part in the show means celebrating the music they share. Music is the totem around which people gather. When the show ends, they once again start to post music videos, as a concert audience does at the end of a performance, when people start to shout "more, more". Listeners would like to listen to more music, but when the show comes to an end, they can only continue to post other music on the FB wall and listen to the music chosen by their peers.

A few minutes after the end of the show the RaiTunes team publishes a You Tube video playlist on FB, a collection of videos of all the songs played during the episode that has just ended.

#### *Twitter*

Twitter is frequently updated by the production team, to disseminate contents, news and You Tube playlists available on other platforms. Broadcast use only.

#### *Website*

The website of the programme contains the archive of all the episodes aired so far, available for listening to in streaming. During the show it is possible to see what is going on in the studio through a mobile webcam situated on the roof. The webcam frames the presenter and his guests and is remote-controlled by the social media manager, on the other side of the studio.

#### *Case history #2: Caterpillar*

**Broadcaster:** Radio2 Rai [www.radio2.rai.it](http://www.radio2.rai.it) (3.781.000 listeners per day - source: Audiradio 2009; 1.647.503 Podcasts download in February 2011 – Source: RAI)

**Programme history:** On air since 1997

**Genre:** Infotainment/talk show

**Tags:** news, satire, social media, networked journalism, crowd-sourcing, UGC, interactivity

**Schedule:** Monday-Friday, 18.00-19.25 (Italian drive time)

Caterpillar is a daily talk show broadcast live by RAI Radio 2, the Italian public channel dedicated to light entertainment. Conceived as a drive time talk show, it is the most listened-to programme on Italian radio in its time slot. It provides an independent, tongue-in-cheek take on national and foreign current affairs. Caterpillar's success is based on a blend of the personalities of the two presenters, the innovative way in which listeners participate, the alternative music format and the sense of belonging to a "special" community. Phone talk plays a key role, occupying more than one third of the programme (listeners, correspondents, politicians, artists, critics, etc.)

#### **Web and social networks**

**Website/blog:** <http://caterpillar.blog.rai.it/>

**Facebook profile:** <http://www.facebook.com/caterpillar.radio2?ref=ts>

**Facebook stats** (as of 05/03/2011): 38.134 "likes" ( + 10.000 in 4 months)

**Twitter profile:** <http://twitter.com/caterpillarra>

**Twitter stats** (as of 05/03/2011): 944 followers, 809 tweets

Podcasts are easy to access from the Rai iPhone application

## Social media activity

### *Blog*

The blog is updated every day with a synopsis of the latest show and videos of the music played. It is used as a multimedia archive of the programme. It is the "official historian" of the show, a time-capsule that tells the story so far.

### *Facebook fan page*

Before the show, the Caterpillar team posts a "spoiler" of the day's issues/topics on Facebook.

During the show: they post all relevant links (websites, articles and video) about guests and the issues/news debated on-air. The morning after the show a podcast is available for download also via Facebook. The team publishes an average of 3 to 6 wall posts per day, "liked" and commented by an average of 20 to 100 fans. The presenters and authors of the programme usually join the conversation and interact directly with their fans. Fans can also find relevant excerpts of the show (a live music show, poetry by the correspondent Marco Ardemagni, satirical videos) available on demand on the fan page, extra contents not aired during the show and extra content not suitable for radio (video interviews from the correspondents, text notes, collection of photos of special events).

### *Twitter*

The Caterpillar Twitter profile page, however, is more institutional and formal. It is only used as a one-to-many medium, in order to disseminate to "followers" issues and links related to the programme. It looks more like a newspaper-style homepage.

## Audience participation

Facebook fans of the programme post comments both in real time (during the show) and after. Fans publish an average of 7 to 15 wall posts every day. Listeners use Facebook not only to show whether they like something that has been broadcast or not, but also to publish news and links they find useful, either for the programme or for the "Caterpillar community". Listeners are keen participants on the Facebook page, something which is encouraged and promoted on-air via calls for support/help/reporting.

The radio show and the Facebook page are both examples of networked media, since they rely heavily on user generated content and comments.

### *Case history #3: Io Sono Qui*

**Broadcaster:** Radio24 Rai [www.radio24.it](http://www.radio24.it) (1.885.000 listeners per day - source: Audiradio 2009)

**Programme history:** On air since January 2010

**Genre:** autofiction

**Tags:** storytelling; fiction; diary; drama; talk show

**Schedule:** Monday-Friday, 16.05-16.45

*Io Sono Qui* is a daily live fictional programme broadcast by Radio24, a talk&news national commercial station owned by the editorial group of Il Sole24 Ore. Its blend is based on a mix of storytelling, drama and talkshow, all performed live by the actor/presenter. Every day the presenter tells the story of his life as if it was an

audio diary and shares his experiences with the listeners. The second part of the programme is based on the phone calls of listeners who want to share their private stories.

*Web and social networks*

**Website/blog:** <http://www.radio24.it>

**Facebook profile:** <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Matteo-Caccia-io-sono-qui/163190700390424>

**Facebook stats** (as of 05/03/2011): 5.844 "likes"

**Twitter profile:** none

### **Social media strategy and audience participation**

Seven hours before the show, the programme's team posts a "spoiler" of the day's issue/topic on Facebook (both on the FB fan page of the programme and on the presenter's personal profile), asking fans/friends if they have experienced life stories similar to the one posted by the presenter. Fans and friends start to reply to the presenter's call with comments and long posts, sharing private experiences of everyday life through Facebook. Before the beginning of the radio show Facebook is used as a great stage for the storytelling performances of the listeners/fans, that can be rewarded by the audience who click "like" under their posts. The author of the programme has accustomed his Facebook audience to expect one call every morning. He opens the game with the first post of the day, letting the listeners be the main characters of the play on the Facebook stage. During the week of observation, the presenter's calls received between 25 and 80 comments, depending on the popularity of the topic.

Almost every day the author chooses one story among the best ones appeared on Facebook in the hours before the show. He contacts the person who posted the comment/story by private Facebook message to ask if he/she wants to take part in the live radio show and tell the story he/she has written on Facebook over the phone. Usually the first phone call of the day comes from a Facebook fan, then the presenter starts to take other live phone calls too. Sometimes fans spontaneously reply to the call of the day by posting an excerpt of a film or a song that reminds them of the topic of the day on the Wall. The presenter normally edits and uses these contents embedding them into the radio flow of the episode of the day. One hour before the show the author posts a YouTube link to the video of the song that will be broadcast during his story. Facebook is conceived as a mine of rough contents to be chosen, edited and then embedded into the radio production flow. Comments, life stories, links to video or audio contents, are used by the author and his team as material for the production of the forthcoming show.

During the show: fans and friends that are listening to the show through the web post comments about the programme on the wall.

After the show: fans keep on commenting the show that has just ended and start to post on the wall a photo shot by them that can represent where they are in that very moment (emotionally or geographically). These photos are described on air by the presenter in the following day's show, as an emotional map of the listeners of the programme and as an answer to the question "Where are you?".

All these photos are collected in an FB album named "I'm here" (the title of the programme).

During the observed week fans published an average of 6 to 20 posts per day on the wall of the programme, while the programme's team made between 3 and 5 posts per day.

As in the other two case histories, RaiTunes and Caterpillar, this programme can also be defined as a co-production with the listeners/authors through the SNS. RaiTunes uses the music links suggested by the audience, Caterpillar uses the news links suggested by the audience, Io Sono Qui uses the life stories told by the audience and its content suggestions (photos, video, songs).

## **Social media Manifesto for radio**

Even if social media use has entered the production routine of radio only in the last two to three years, turning out to be a crucial tool, but quite often misunderstood and underestimated too, in the case histories analysed so far we can note many similar social media practices, which are both effective and innovative. The comparative study reveals that broadcasters have finally started to understand the importance of social media in nurturing their relation with audiences, like an umbilical cord connecting listeners to producers while the radio is off. As a conclusion, we will try to put together the best practices discovered during the research and write a kind of Social Media Manifesto, or more simply, a bare bones guide to the ideal social media strategy for broadcasters.

### *1. Dramaturgic structure*

Social media management is an authorial and creative work. It is similar to the work of a theatre director and has to do with storytelling. And storytelling has its rules. Social media spaces are not virtual at all, they are lively spaces where people attempt to show themselves at their best, making great efforts to perform one of the characters they would love to look like in real life. Social media management is about telling the best story about ourselves for the audience of our friends/fans. As people's FB and TW profiles are nothing but storytelling performances, programmes' profiles have to address issues of performance and storytelling too.

The most successful Facebook and Twitter pages analysed so far all share a specific and clearly recognisable dramaturgic structure: frequent, cyclical and regular updates, every day. Facebook and Twitter provide a flood of data, and posts and tweets will quickly flow off followers' screens. Tweeting frequently will build a bigger following. Radio producers have to show listeners that they are always alive, always present, and they have to convince them to visit their page more often during the day. They have to build expectations among their followers. Posting 15 tweets a day, but all in the same half hour, will not do, as most of the followers will not even see them. Radio producers have to educate the public, making them feel that their page is constantly updated with valuable contents. We could call this strategy "Dramaturgy in three acts":

*First Act – Waiting for the show: in this first step you can use social media both as a teaser, to promote the upcoming broadcast by pushing contents to the fans/followers (post about the issue of the day, previews of upcoming guests and panellists, photos of the presenters, prizes to be won, bonus audio or jingles, videos of the music played, live events in which to take part etc...) and/or as a resource for retrieving fresh contents (pull technology) from the listeners.*

*Second Act - During the show: InterAct*

*We have noticed that successful work and presence on social media generates a continual flow of comments and updates from listeners during the show. If in the first act the main actor/performer is the programme team, as the most active actor in posting items, in this second act the listeners have to take centre stage. The more a radio live show and Facebook activity interact and cross-communicate, the more the listeners' "community" will strengthen its ties to the programme.*

*Third Act – After the show: the show must go on*

*Successful programmes are conceived like multimedia projects. When the radio show comes to an end, the programme continues on the web. The programme's team posts links to related issues, podcast availability alerts (or directly embed an on demand player on FB), audio and video excerpts from the programme (in case of live music in the radio studio, for example), asks for comments and promotes the issue of the following day. This closing act is a perfect moment, as we have monitored, to cultivate the relationship between the show's 'personalities' and the audience.*

### *2. On air/on line/ on site. Cross media interaction*

Connect all the platforms and enforce communication flows between them. One good practice we noticed



in talk shows is to give the same importance to listener feedback, no matter which platform they came from (email, phone call, sms, Facebook, Twitter). The debate around the issue of the day starts on social media, then continues on air: the presenters keep quoting comments made in real time on social networks.

If people get used to knowing that what happens in the social mediasphere is valuable for the programme too, they will participate more.

### 3. Personalise and "storify"<sup>1</sup> content

The most successful communication on social media is personal in tone and content.

Presenters and authors of the programme have to play at the listeners' level, and to build a fair and straight interaction with them. Every time you post something on social media you should provide it with a context for it to be properly understood, and personalise information, adding your personal view or feeling. Every podcast alert you make has to be accompanied by a quick and personal synopsis of the programme contents, using a catchy language, not the cold and standardised language of marketing but the warmer one of true personal engagement with it. Every post is a little story.

### 4. Take advantage of General Intellect and realize Walter Benjamin's dream

Social media are wonderful tools for nurturing and empowering the General Intellect<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to their networked structure, social media seem to be making the dream of Brecht and Benjamin<sup>3</sup> come true: listeners becoming authors (UGC). Among your listeners lie hundreds of experts in different fields willing to take part in content production. Caterpillar (RAI) perfectly outsources some reporting to the listeners and takes advantage of citizen journalism: its listeners publish suggestions about topics to be discussed and offer themselves as reporters from the place they live in. Ask listeners to tweet their reports in real time while travelling. The minds of the listeners, once connected through social media, can be very powerful and fast.

### 5. Share the love

Share, quote, forward, retweet valuable contents. The social mediascape is based on what some economists and anthropologists have called the "gift economy". You need to give in order to get. Reward interesting and on-topic posts published by listeners by clicking the "like" button. Like it or not, but "liking" is the only accepted value by the whole social media community. Pay attention to which posts are more commented and/or more loved, and why.

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<sup>1</sup> With reference to this, have a look at [www.storify.com](http://www.storify.com) and [www.storyful.com](http://www.storyful.com)

<sup>2</sup> According to Karl Marx, who was the first to come up with this concept, the General Intellect (the collective mind) is a crucial factor in production and is a combination of technological expertise and social intellect, or general social knowledge

<sup>3</sup> See W. Benjamin "Reflexionen zum Rundfunk", 1930

Vol. No. 51 Issue No. 1 (January/March 2000) pp. 5–24

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