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Opening Keynote:
Unpicking the myths and misunderstandings of radio in the digital age

Andrew Dubber
dubber@gmail.com

Hi. I'm going to start with a bit of nostalgia.

And so Molly ran. And the giant ran. And they both ran. And he ran and she ran, and he ran and she ran – until they came to bridge of the single hair. Molly skipped over it, but the giant stayed. For get over, he could not. "Woe betide you, Molly Whuppie, if you e'er return again…"

Hi – I'm Andrew Dubber and to say that I'm delighted to be here would be a gross understatement.

This is my home. These are my people. I'm 43 now – and for the first 37 years of my life this *place* and this *subject* – Auckland, and Radio – and particularly *New Zealand* radio – have been my two main ingredients. You're going to have to excuse a little self-indulgent personal narrative, but it *is* leading somewhere, and I *do* have a point.

I grew up listening to the radio. It wasn't time to walk to primary school until Merv Smith had chatted to MacHairy the Scottish spider just after the 8 o'clock news. Each year, my family – Mum, Dad, my two sisters and I - would go on holiday to a bach at Stanmore Bay in Whangaparoa – and I'd always be secretly pleased when it was too wet to go to the beach, because over the Christmas & New Year summer break, 1YA would play old episodes of BBC radio comedies like the Navy Lark, Dad's Army, Round the Horne, I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again and The Goons.

I learned to play cribbage, while laughing at Eccles and Bluebottle in a small, slopey-floored wooden house by the sea as the rain came down outside. Or at least, that's how I remember it.
And at the end of our vacation, on the way home each year, we listened to Casey Kasem's American Top 40 hits of Nineteen-Seventy-X on the car radio. I have a particularly strong memory of it having been a close-run thing between Andy Gibb's Shadow Dancing, and Meco's disco version of the Star Wars Theme that one year – and this was a source of tremendous anticipation and excitement.

Now, Google assures me that this is not even a real memory – and that those two songs weren't even in the charts in the same *year* – but the point remains.

I think "Turn It Up!" might have been my most used phrase of the summer. Probably still is.

Throughout the rest of the year, every Sunday morning, I'd listen as Don Linden played stories like Molly Whuppie, Gerald McBoingBoing, Sparky and the Talking Train, Flick the Fire Engine, Little Toot, Gossamer Wump and of course – still my favourite – Spike Milligan's Badjelly The Witch, a musical story written and performed by Spike, which - like the song Snoopy's Christmas - is inexplicably little-known in its UK home.

I can remember staying Saturday night at my grandparents' place. Pa Ardern would always get up early and make himself a cocoa. If I got up early enough, he'd make one for me too, and then I could go and tuck back into bed with my toast - in time for the children's stories on 1ZB or 1YA.

It was engrossing, it fired the imagination - and the way I remember it, it was pretty much at the centre of my childhood. In fact, arguably, radio and music have been what I've hung most of my memories off – real or imagined - and now that I come to think about it, it's pretty much how I connect everything to do with memory, and meaning. I guess that makes it pretty powerful stuff.

And then, after a while, I discovered that Nana and Pa had another setting on their radio: shortwave. There, amongst all the static, if you held the aerial just right, were distant voices, strange music and people talking to each other in foreign languages. It's a cliché, of course, to say that I was *transported*, but I don't really know another way to describe that feeling, sitting on the front porch, hearing just how big the rest of the world was.

In my early teens, I was a fan of Radio Hauraki and 1251ZM as it was known then in equal measure. I knew the names of the presenters, I rang in for competitions, and even once wrote a letter to Hauraki with my friend Richard Leaman at the age of about 12, offering our own ideas for competitions. They thanked us and sent us a cap each.

The music was, of course, central to all this. Radio was my main source of music listening. Mum and Dad had records at home, of course, but I was quick to figure out that Roger Whittaker, Andy Williams and Helen Reddy were not really for me.

I even reckon I figured out the playlist rotates and pretty much knew when - say - the B52s 'Rock Lobster' – for instance - would turn up again. Of course, I didn't know they were called rotates, or even that there was such a thing as a playlist – but I could tell that the presenters obviously liked some of the same records I liked, so they were bound to play it sooner rather than later, right?

The first album I ever chose for myself in a record shop was paid for by a voucher won in a phone-in competition. Again, 1ZM. Dad drove me to the radio station to pick up my prize. This was 1980. I bought David Bowie's 'Scary Monsters and Super Creeps' but I must have spent a good half hour torn between that and Donna Summer's 'The Wanderer', while my Dad waited in the aisles of Jim's Record Spot in Panmure as I made what I knew to be a critical decision in my life of music fandom.

Around that time, there was a late Sunday night programme on 1ZM – way past my bedtime - which, as I recall, was essentially about the apocalypse. All the ways in which we were likely to die imminently, collectively and absolutely as a species. Of course, I listened under the covers with a transistor and a torch, as you do. The programme featured all the popular nuclear paranoia of the time, as well as a lot of terrifying scenarios from religion and mythology. The emergence of the barcode on products was, for instance, evidence of something in the Book of Revelations. The Cold War was at its height, a planet obliterating World War 3 was just a matter of moments away. Minutes to Midnight. And if you counted the number of letters in Ronald Wilson Reagan's name, you got 666.

The series was interspersed with music that fitted the theme – and it was the first time I heard Peter Gabriel's Games Without Frontiers, and started to piece together the fact that songs could have meaning beyond boy meets girl, and then they do the Bus Stop.

Those kiwis present younger than me might be surprised to learn that Radio Hauraki released an album called Homegrown that year, which celebrated new, independent local music. They playlisted the tracks, and the more I heard it, the more of a fan I was of those artists and those songs. That has always seemed to me the most obvious thing in the world. Radio stations playing songs to *make* them popular – not *because* they're popular. Not entirely sure what happened to that idea or why local stations in the UK have chosen to ignore their own power

in that respect, and almost exclusively play safe, tested chart fodder. But pausing only to wave a flag for local music, wherever you happen to be, we return to our story.

What was great, influential and powerful about that Homegrown album, of course, was the idea that in order to be a musician – or to put out a record – you didn't have to be as foreign and bizarre as David Bowie, nor as glamorous and funky as Donna Summer. Not that New Zealand records hadn't existed before 1980 – just that I'd never really noticed that they were New Zealand records.

Jon Stevens, Mark Williams, Sharon O'Neill and Split Enz were just *popstars*, and so separate from my reality that their New Zealandness pretty much entirely escaped me. And while of course there was all sorts of interesting stuff going on in my backyard at places like Mainstreet and The Gluepot at the time, punk was so below my radar at Pakuranga Intermediate School or at the rollerskating rink I attended as a corduroy-clad pre-teen - that it might as well not have existed. But music and radio were everything.

Music has always been centrally important to me, and radio was the method through which I arrived at my love of, and appreciation for music of all sorts – and particularly new and challenging pieces of music. British colleagues had John Peel. We had Barry Jenkin. Doctor Rock. The poor, antipodean man's John Peel.

Again, younger members of the audience here may be surprised to learn that new and challenging music has ever had a significant place on mainstream commercial radio – but in the early days of FM (and in New Zealand, that was the late 1980s) – music that wasn't being played on the big AM stations was one of the FM format's big selling points.

Meanwhile, back in 1981 – just a couple of years after it originally debuted on BBC radio in the UK - The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy was broadcast on The National Programme as it was known then. And my cassette recorder was put to good use making sure I didn't miss a moment of it.

For not just me, but for my generation of radio and comedy enthusiasts, Douglas Adams had created a masterpiece of its medium. And while the story's still broadly revered, a lot of people forget this these days, but here was something

that started life as a radio programme, and only later became a series of books, a dreadful television series, and a feature film that could only ever hope to disappoint. In fact, the only thing that ever came close to the radio series were the records that used the same scripts, the same actors, the same sound effects, and just a little more care and attention when it came to the direction and sound design. The Hitchhiker's Guide has radio in its DNA, and to me, anything else was a mutation. This point about being medium-appropriate is an important one – and one I'll return to in a bit.

If I recall correctly, Santa brought me the records of that series. And throughout the 80s, I listened to them and my cassettes of the radio series so often, I can still, to this day, recite the first half hour episode verbatim, from memory, start to finish. The theme tune to The Hitchhiker's guide still sends shivers up my spine whenever I hear it. So imagine my horror when I later found out, in the music snobbery of my mid 20s, that one of the most important musical motifs in my personal biography was actually an album track by The Eagles. I still kind of resent that fact rather a lot.

I guess it was unsurprising then that I ended up in radio. In fact, radio *ruined* my academic career… as you can probably tell. Rather than attend undergraduate classes in English literature, Art History and Music theory at that other university across the road, I went straight up to student radio station bFM and tried to find ways in which I could be involved.

Now… at this point, I could talk you through, in detail, my progression through student radio, hanging out in the studios at 91FM and Radio Hauraki, helping set up doomed Manukau radio station Oasis 94FM, making ads for Radio Pacific for about 5 years, researching, writing and producing my first radio documentary series in 1994 – a 26 part, 1-hour a week programme about the history of jazz, setting up my own radio production company making radio drama series, jazz programmes and other syndicated shows, hosting a nationwide specialist music radio show, creating children's radio programmes, making documentaries, starting the NZ Radio email discussion list, instigating the Auckland society of Low Power FM Broadcasters, and lobbying for KidsNet - a nationwide New Zealand children's radio network - as a viable alternative to the political football that was the teen-focused Youth Radio Network in the late 90s and early 2000s. But I'm not going to do that, because the point of this story has been made, I think.

And it's this: I love radio.

And it's really important to me that you realize that, because without really understanding how significant radio is as a defining cultural force and as a central part of my life – *not just my career* – I think what I have to say would probably have a good deal less impact, and less significance. In fact, there'd almost be very little point in me saying it, and almost nothing at stake.

In 2003, I attended my first international academic conference. As it happens, it was this conference – The Radio Conference: A Transnational Forum, in Madison Wisconsin. Some of you were there. I was a beginning researcher, having returned from industry and started teaching and researching. I was on a panel about internet radio. I found myself on the same bill as Tim Wall, which I have to say was a little daunting, as was having David Hendy and Ken Garner in the audience, both of whom I quoted in my paper. Tim was head of the Radio Studies Network and co-organizer of the conference. He kicked off with a paper called The Political Economy of Internet Radio – and I followed it with one called 'There's No Such Thing As Internet Radio'. Smooth.

This speech that I'm giving now – what I'm eventually leading up to here – could well be thought of as a follow-up to that paper. Full circle. Let's call it 'Forget *internet* radio - There's Not even Such Thing As *Radio'*.

And of course, a title like that needs some unpicking – particularly at a radio studies conference. And of course, it is just a piece of rhetoric, rather than a rigorous investigation of the media landscape that results in an entire lack of evidence of any kind of audio broadcasting.
Radio exists. Of course it exists. I don't need to tell you that.

But my contention is that in order to think about radio properly, you have to accept the fact that in an important way, Radio is a meaningless term in the contemporary media environment. I mean, it's useful for purposes of branding, advertising and conversation – but as academics, we need to interrogate the term with some rigour, rather than simply use it as shorthand for a range of different things, in the way that we do.

I'd like to make the rather provocative case, here at the beginning of a radio

conference, that Radio is not merely obsolete, but is so devoid of coherent meaning as a concept delineating a category of media, that we might as well abandon the idea of it altogether.

Now bear with me. Remember – this is just rhetoric for the sake of a provocation – but as I said – I do have a point to make: There's no such thing as radio. Which brings me neatly to what I consider to be the beginning of my speech. There are three key touchstones to this speech.
The first of them, as those who've heard me speak before will be unsurprised to learn, is Marshall McLuhan.

The second is the poet William Blake – and especially the work of Canadian Blake scholar, literary critic and colleague of McLuhan's, Northrop Frye.

The third is a man most of you won't have heard of, but in whose memory I'd dedicate this speech – John Haynes, who was the Operations Manager at Radio Pacific, my mentor, the man from whom I learned almost everything I know about the radio industry, and who shaped my thinking about programme making, technology, storytelling, hell – even parenting – and how the universe works.

I've been lucky to encounter and work with some really influential thinkers in my life. Fortunately, most of them are still with us. John is greatly missed and a good deal of what you're going to hear here is directly influenced by his approach to knowledge, which can be summed up in a phrase: Take nothing for granted.

So what's radio and why is it so problematic? Probably a good idea to start with some definitions, although as we all know, definitions are nothing but a trap for academics and that way lies essentialism.

Now hold that thought – here's a quick sidebar: I'm involved in a European Jazzresearch project with a bunch of other academics from a bunch of different universities. Some of us are media scholars, some are musicians, some musicologists. And we were all having a preliminary meeting at a café in Vienna (which I throw in to sound jetsetty), and we were talking about what it was about European jazz that we thought was so interesting and worthy of study.

And after listening to us talk about live concerts, recordings, fan cultures, broadcasts, record collecting, the development of instruments, the effect of technology on what's become known as the "Nordic Tone" in jazz – the Austrian musicologist, who had been quiet this whole time, looked at us and announced "Well, of course, what I'm interested in is The Music Itself."

And by that, he meant dots on the page.

What's interesting about that is to the rest of us, the study of jazz music had not even included those printed dots. To him, that *was* the music, and everything else we'd been talking about was at best peripheral. At best.

Same applies to radio – and that's something I've noticed when talking to other radio academics both at my own university and at conferences like this. We hear each other speak about radio, and think 'well, that's all very interesting, but what I'm concerned with is *radio itself*'.

Because of course, when we say "radio" we can be talking about one of several different things. There's the receiving device – that little plastic box with wires in it that sits on the kitchen bench. That's a radio. Let's call that the PHYSICAL FORM.

Then there's the transmission of radio waves through the electromagnetic spectrum. That's radio too. Let's call that one METHOD OF TRANSMISSION.

Then there's radio as a type of content. Radio documentary, radio drama, radio show, radio ad… and so on. Let's call that THE TEXT.

Then there are radio stations – continuous streams of audio output that we can tune into as listeners: Radio 4. WBEZ Chicago. Mai FM. Radio Ethiopia. Let's call those… well, let's call them STATIONS, for lack of a better word.

But those are separate from those places of business that radio workers turn up to and do their jobs. Those can be tiny studios in people's houses, or they can be large corporate complexes – network hubs from which a number of different station outputs emerge. Let's call those the INFRASTRUCTURAL FORM.

We can talk about radio in terms of its LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK, its

TECHNOLOGICAL MANIFESTATION, the PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE itself, the way in which it is integrated into the MUSIC BUSINESS AND PROMOTIONAL CULTURE… and so on.

We also understand quite well the way in which radio can be LOCALLY DEFINED – New Zealand, dominated by commercial music, complete deregulation and the interesting phenomenon of legal microbroadcasting; the UK with the dominance of public broadcasting, fierce competition in the commercial sector, a burgeoning but troubled community radio sector and its culturally powerful "pirate" radio, which stokes the fires of new musical forms; the United States with its parallel history that leads to a differently networked (and voluntarily supported) public radio landscape that serves a different and complementary purpose to the ecology of massive commercial and influential college radio and the struggle for Low Power FM stations; or India with its brand new forays into FM radio that are broadly emulating US commercial formats but integrating Bollywood hits and are hemorrhaging money at an alarming rate. So that's a way in which we can understand and define radio.

I make that ten different ways in which we can approach and define radio, without really even trying very hard. You're probably thinking I missed your one. Your own "radio itself".

Okay – another quick sidebar: a story I like to tell my students to illustrate the idea of media shift is a story simply called The Theatre Director – and it goes like this:

There's this guy who works as a theatre director. I usually give him a name. Let's call him Simon. And he's really good at his job. He understands character, narrative, props, lighting, pacing and direction – and he uses them to put together fantastic theatre. And people really enjoy what he does, and it has a really significant cultural impact on their lives.

And then someone invents television. And the TV people bring their cameras to the theatre, and set it all up so that they're pointing at the stage. But it's just not the same. Apart from anything else, all the big cameras and cables get in the way, and televised theatre doesn't have the same immersive impact as live theatre. But television is quite definitely here to stay, so Simon has an important decision to make. Does he keep trying to make theatre that gets televised, or

does he use his skills in narrative, characterization, and so on to make TV shows? Because that's a different thing. And in my version of the story, he goes off and makes The Sopranos, or Outrageous Fortune or some other great TV show that understands the medium on its own terms – but still uses all his core storytelling skills.

And the point of the story is that when you take a new medium, and simply point it at its predecessor, you misunderstand both. And more importantly, to think in terms of theatre, and then point TV cameras at it underutilizes the power of both media.

Back to definitions.

Radio has been defined elsewhere as "theatre of the mind" – and often also in the literature as a "secondary medium". And I have to admit I spent a few years teaching that idea before I really gave it some decent thought and came to the considered conclusion that it was utter bollocks. Radio is your most multi-modal mass medium. Of *course*, it's possible to 'consume' radio programming at a secondary level of attention, but that's inherent in the mode of consumption – and not in, what I like to think of as 'the radio itself'.

Which brings us back to square one.

If what I think of as being an essential characteristic of radio – that utterly transporting phenomenon that has me at one moment fearing for the future of humanity while listening to Peter Gabriel under my bedspread, laughing at the destruction of the planet Earth to make way for a hyperspace bypass the next, dialing and redialing in the hopes of getting through to win a record voucher at another, pleading with my parents to 'turn it up' because the speakers were by the front seats of the Datsun, and I was in the back with my sisters, trying to hear whether the world (ie: America) agreed with me that no matter how great the movie Star Wars was (and it was, let's agree, *awesome*), Andy Gibb had made the record of the year, hands down – then secondary is not the word I would have chosen.

So first we need to agree that there IS no "radio itself". It's not the physical form, the method of transmission, the text, the stations, the infrastructural form, the technological manifestation, the legislative framework and nor is it a series of

professional practices nor their by-product. It is the sum of all of these parts, applied to a cultural context and experienced by listeners who extrapolate and contribute their own meanings to it. I'm arguing here for a holistic study of radio that helps us actually understand it.

Otherwise, we're like the three blind men, when introduced to an elephant for the first time, who compare it variously to a large snake, a wall and a piece of rope, depending on which bit they had their hands on, when in fact, none of these is *the elephant itself*.

However, and this is where things get more complex, each of these components is shifting over time - the ways in which we create, consume and experience radio change - as do the reasons for doing so, thanks to rapid and accelerating changes in both the technological and the cultural framework within which we're situated as makers of radio, consumers of radio and scholars of radio.

Let's talk about some of those changes and go through those characteristics that go to make up what we think of as "radio itself":

1) The physical form of radio
Okay. Now, once again, this is really simple and obvious stuff, but for the sake of a group of such learned, sophisticated and nuanced critics of the medium, it's worth stepping back and saying things that are entirely rudimentary.

I remember the radio that I had at home, and the one that graced the dashboard of that Datsun had a dial, a needle, numbers from 530 up to 1600, sometimes the three-alphanumeric character names of radio stations like 1YC, 2ZB, 3YA and at times, on a big radiogram – which was really more a piece of furniture than what you might think of as a radio these days - the names of odd places around the world like Hilversum, Athlone, Luxembourg and Droitwich as well as Wellington and Sydney. The knobs were just as likely to be made of Bakelite and if you took it to bits, there were coils, transistors, screws and wires.

These days, the physical form of radio is likely to also be the physical form of an alarm clock or a mobile telephone. The bits on the inside are chips imprinted on a circuit board, there's no needle or printed numbers and sometimes not just the name of the radio station appears on the digital display – but even the name of the song currently playing. Tuning is a matter of button pressing, rather than dial

turning – and if there's a traffic report going on, your car radio is reasonably likely to do the tuning and volume adjustment all by itself.

What it looks like, how it works, and how you operate it – all different.

2) The method of transmission

Well, of course AM radio transmission still exists, and FM's hardly new either, but the aforementioned automated change of station and RDS text information is made up of digital data that accompanies the modulated electromagnetic waves which carry the signal across town. In order to make this happen, new transmission technology needed to be introduced. And we haven't even started to talk about developments in transmission technologies that are digital at the point of transmission and at reception (though not through the air, of course – even digital DAB radio signals have to be converted to analogue waves in order to travel through the electromagnetic spectrum). But that's another story. Eureka 147, IBOC HD Radio, Digital Radio Mondiale are all contemporary radio broadcasting technologies that are, from an engineering perspective, almost entirely unlike their predecessors. Development in radio transmission has been characterized by distinctive breaks, rather than gradual developments. And that's before you get to internet radio – which isn't even broadcasting at all – but that's something we'll hopefully get to. So again – all different.

3) The text of radio

What we *hear* on the radio is often the subject of what we study and talk about at conferences like this. We academics are a sophisticated lot, so we tend to prioritise serious, spoken word programming when it comes to our interests in radio content. But popular music, of course, forms both the majority of radio output, and what attracts the largest audiences to over-the-air broadcast radio. And the degree to which programming has changed in recent years is arguably as radical as the extent to which the physical form and the method of transmission have changed. Tightly niche-formatted stations replace broad family fare. Drama and documentary forms on commercial radio have all but disappeared – and only really in the last 20 years. Public broadcasters tend no longer to record or broadcast live musicians – again this is a relatively recent development. We're not talking about the olden days or golden years of radio here. I had a pianist and string section in the Helen Young Studio at Radio New Zealand as recently as 1998 performing music for a serialized drama that broadcast in the middle of the afternoon on Newstalk ZB. Unthinkable today –

particularly since the gorgeous Helen Young Studio's been torn down to make room for some offices. Straight ahead Top 40 radio has largely given way to CHR, Hot AC and Triple A formats. Speech radio – in New Zealand almost more than anywhere else – consists largely of the voices of listeners rather than presenters. Sponsored content now extends to weather, traffic and even different sections of the news bulletin. Even the time checks are brought to you by something or other. The point is - almost everything that comes out of the radio speaker is categorically different than what came out of the radio speaker when Radio Studies was just getting started as a discipline.

4) The stations

Except – we don't call them stations anymore. They're brands. Radio 2. Galaxy. More. XFM. ZM. With networking, regionalized content, centralized programming, voicetracking, the use of Master Control, Selector, PowerGold, Nautilus – what we know as radio stations: these constant streams of targeted programming that you can step in and out of, and always know what to expect, more or less – are different than they used to be. There are far more of them, and they are market-researched, automated and fine-tuned within an inch of their lives.

5) The infrastructural form

And automation, digital recording, voicetracking, digital networking, newsroom outsourcing, the ISDN line and other technologies beside, have rendered the workplace of radio professionals virtually unrecognizable. 23 years ago, when I got started in radio, studios consisted of mixing desks, large and expensive microphones, multitrack tape recorders, banks of cart machines and tape cartridges, multiple record players, reel to reel decks, razor blades, china pencils, and so many pieces of paper – scripts, logs, cue sheets, playlists. The record library took up a sizable chunk of the station floorplan, and the sales room looked like a scene from Glengarry Glen Ross. There were more ashtrays than coffee cups. I had my own office designated a work-free smokeplace – and, of course, contra was king. I must have dined out three times a week in exchange for broadcast advertising, my first fridge and even my honeymoon was paid for with airtime. And not *my* airtime – just favours I had accrued from sales reps who seemed to have advertisers' goods and services coming out of their ears. And to hear my older colleagues tell the story, we had it tough. In the mid-late 1980s, just before I started in the game, having a radio station was virtually a licence to print money, and every day was a coke-addled party. Go back ten

years from that – in fact get on YouTube, search for scenes from the TV show WKRP or the movie FM. Look at the studio. This is not where our students will be working. I mean… thank god, but the point is radical change.

6) The legislative framework

You may have heard it before, and I can guarantee you're going to hear it again throughout this conference: New Zealand has the single most deregulated radio marketplace on the planet. There are more stations per head of population. This is a country in which any citizen wishing to do so can simply purchase a transmitter for less than $2000, switch it on, and start broadcasting. But deregulation hasn't only happened in New Zealand. This a global regulatory shift. But laws about cross media ownership, networking, private radio, and the ability to change formats on a whim are not the only kind of legislative framework that is changing what we think of as radio. Everything from the tax laws - to laws about decency and impartiality have shifted and are still shifting today.

7) The technological manifestation

HD Radio. DAB. On Demand. Listen Again. Streaming radio. Podcasting. Last.FM, Pandora. Spotify. Mixcloud. Freeview and Sky TV Radio channels. The ways in which we can experience what gets called radio – and what we often think of as radio – are so fundamentally different than each other, and than everything that ever came before it - that given just a moment's thought, it seems unlikely that these things could even share a common name.

8) The professional practice

If you have a job in radio today, no matter what it is, there's a good chance that job didn't exist just thirty years ago. And even if it did, what that role entails now consists of a range of entirely different activities than your equivalent did in the past. For a start, you're using a computer. In 1981, the only radio people using a computer were the accounts people. Later, the advertising schedule became computerized, then the on-air schedule, then copywriters started using word processors. But in the studio, the music library, the newsroom, the sales office, the on-air booth and the engineering department – a computer would have been as out of place as a forklift truck. This was a noisy piece of machinery designed to do the heavy lifting, intellectually speaking. Remove the computers from radio today and the airwaves fall silent.

But that's not all, of course. What people do all day at radio stations has changed. For a start, many of them are not *there* all day. Thanks to voice-tracking, the midnight to dawn announcer is only in for a few hours once a week to pre-record the voice links for the next seven days of programmes. The music programmer has to press the F10 button on the computer every other day to generate the next batch of music programming and send it to the on-air playout system. The newsroom "journalists" (in inverted commas) wait for a press release to reword - and call the provided phone number to speak to the newsworthy person and get their couple of rehearsed soundbites to add into the bulletin. Had you been a music director or PD at a rock station, your job would once have involved quite a lot of listening to music, going to gigs, researching artists and – more importantly, understanding, encouraging and giving some guidance to the enthusiasms of the on-air presenters who were music experts in their own right. Today, you would have weightier concerns like making sure the presenters kept to the scripts on their liner cards, that TSL was up despite an ever-increasing ad load, and that the ongoing audience research supported the few minor changes made to the playlist this week.

It's fair to say that these differences are not entirely universal, but that's not to say that they are exaggerated either.

But perhaps more important than this – is that what a radio station IS has changed. My laptop is a radio station – of sorts. Internet radio, podcasting and other forms of online music and audio distribution platforms, whether linear and timebound, personalized or mass-audience have all reshaped what the radio station workplace can be. Where do you make radio? Last time I made a radio documentary for broadcast I was on a train to Glasgow. Last time I spoke live on air, I was in Helsinki, and I used my iPhone. The last two hour Sunday Jazz specialist music show I presented was on Spotify.

9) Music business integration

Radio is both a promotional tool and an important source of revenue for the music business. The recording industry, the live music industry and the publishing business all rely on airplay, advertising and co-sponsorship via radio's mass audiences for the continuation of their somewhat threatened livelihood. Meanwhile, radio relies on the recording industry for content - and the live sector for advertising revenue and branding opportunities. But of course, this is an entirely different music industry than the one that radio relied upon in the

early days of FM – and the relationship is configured entirely differently. For a start, welcome to a world with only three major record labels. A world of X-Factor and Pop Idol. A world where the surest way to make a living in a live arena is to reform the band you had a hit with in 1985. Breaking bands is no longer a core business of radio. Radio's relationship with the promotional culture of music industries is to talk about karaoke television programmes, and play reassuringly familiar music so that people don't tune out. If this sounds like a bitter overstatement of the case by a lover of the vast majority of all music that will no longer ever get airplay on a traditional commercial radio station, there's a good reason for that…

But as the definition of radio broadens to the point where these definitions become meaningless – particularly MY definitions, other manifestations of music industries – smaller, independent, grassroots music can get 'airplay' even if it's not actually over the air. And as the barrier to starting your own station has effectively ceased to exist, if nobody else will play you, just plug your microphone into your laptop and away you go.

10) The local and regional characteristics

Radio used to be simple – at least, most places in the world. The UK was weird in that the BBC was always configured nationally, even if it was entirely London-centric. But elsewhere, at least – certainly here in New Zealand - in your city, there was a studio and a transmitter. People in that studio talked and played records – and if you lived close enough to the transmitter, you could hear what they were on about.

Now, radio is what you want to hear, when you want to hear it, from wherever you want to hear it. I live in Birmingham. Occasionally, I listen to Rhubarb Radio – an internet-only radio station run locally by some friends of mine. I also listen to bFM, Base FM, George and Radio NZ National from here in New Zealand while I'm at home in Birmingham. I listen to shows from WBEZ Chicago, WFMU in New Jersey, KCRW in Santa Monica, a friend's radio show in Budapest, the odd bit of Triple J via podcast and a mix of BBC 6 Music via DAB radio, Radio 4 panel shows and maybe Gilles Peterson from time to time on Radio 1 – usually as a Listen Again service via iPlayer, and – probably my favourite – Laid Back Radio, which I think is Belgian with some London connections - via an iPhone app.

You get the idea. The point is that in all ten of these ways, radio is not the same thing. There is no quintessential radio typical characteristic that has carried it through from one era into another. How it works, what it sounds like, how we use it, what it means, what it's for, how you make it and where it's from are utterly up for grabs as technology and society change. As we try to define and understand radio as a continuity, it slips through our fingers. It's a medium that defies any essential definition. Arguably that thing called 'radio' that we're here to talk about – doesn't really exist in any meaningful way.

That is to say, Radio is – in all of these ways – almost entirely unrecognizable in its current configuration, and yet people like you and me can meet together like this and have a 'radio' conference as if there is some continuity, consistency and agreement about what we mean by the term.

Now, early on, I mentioned William Blake and Northrop Frye. You've had your McLuhan, by the way – I snuck a couple of his ideas in there while you weren't looking. Blake scholar Frye wrote a book called the Anatomy of Criticism – don't know if anyone here's familiar with it: Four essays attempting to formulate an overall view of literature and the techniques of literary criticism, with reference only to literature and not to other literary criticism. This was 1957, and so predated postmodernism and deconstructivist criticism.

I first read it, 30 years after it was written, in 1987. Then again in 1997, and in 2007. This was not a deliberate ten year ploy. I don't have the organizational skills or the willpower to pull that off other than entirely accidentally and coincidentally. But it is one of the three most important books I have read in my life, and it has accompanied me through my journey in radio and what I now think of as a career in storytelling. Now, you won't ordinarily get literary criticism included or even referenced in a media studies conference – and rightly so, so I'll try and keep this brief – but it's an idea worth exploring, so bear with me.

One of Frye's central premises is this: that literature has gone through several modes throughout its history: The Mythic, Romantic, High Mimetic, Low Mimetic and Ironic. The journey has been something of a descent from Homer's tales of the Gods down through heroes to high society, to everyday low society, to – well, Beckett and Kafka. And each phase has its characteristics, its ways of treating its protagonists, its interpretations of comedy and tragedy - and its ways

of understanding and representing the world.

But the interesting thing is this. Frye argues that if you come down through the five phases – and keep going – you push down past the Ironic phase, and you end up back at the Mythic again. Right at the top. But this time, you do the Mythic from the point of view of experience. Blake did this in one of his collections, I'm sure you're familiar with: Songs of Innocence and Experience, in which he portrays more or less the same scenarios, types of people and subjects of his poetry, first on the way there from an innocent, naïve and pastoral perspective – then on the way home with experience, worldliness and perhaps a less beatific, but more wise perspective.

To Frye, this is what we're doing in our storytelling. And you can see this perhaps most obviously in our own contemporary world of myth. We're not interested in mythologies of Gods and monsters so much anymore, and nor are we so big on the epic poetry. But we are quite keen on 3-hour long movies about superheroes. These *are* our epic mythical tales. But we have reappraised them recently through experienced eyes. We are telling the stories from the beginning again – the reboot. The origin myths.

Batman is not the mythical creature played by Adam West that we encountered in our age of innocence. He is the Dark Knight that we re-visit through the post-ironic eyes of experience. This is the story that we can now relate to. That we can return to with wisdom, and worldliness - not with naivety and wonder.

What has this got to do with radio? Well it's exactly this. We have passed through the crystal age of mythical voices in the air. Through the golden age of heroes. Through the high mimetic, high society representations of culture on air. Through the low mimetic representations of the everyman, his taste and his humour. Through the ironic and, let's face it, almost dehumanized Kafka-esque nightmare of hyperformatted, personality-less radio.

But we find ourselves in freefall in the digital age. We have emerged out the bottom of the hierarchy of modes, looking for ways to interpret what is going on – searching for what is of interest and what is of significance. And as scholars – this is what we can now look toward. As programme-makers and as radio professionals, we have a map. We know what we have to do.
The path we walked in our innocence, we can now return to having seen and

understood where it leads. This is going to sound like the most empty piece of over-the-rainbow rhetoric to hard-nosed researchers and practitioners alike – but all of those things that brought us to radio in the first place – we now get to go back to them and present them again. To tell the origin stories in a post-ironic age. Not to make vacuous top 100 countdowns of the most popular songs of the year – but still to make programmes as if music matters. Not to make radio comedies that rehash the same territory as Hitchhiker's Guide – but to make new ones that genuinely understand the technology and the culture of the day. Not to make programmes that terrify pre-teens about the impending nuclear holocaust, but perhaps engage them in the same way, in an equally effective way – but in an empowering way about genuine global threats and political issues that they can be informed, engaged, connected and proactive about.

Radio as a mythic force – that same mythic force that both shaped my imagination as a child and who I have become as an adult – is back. It's already back. Most of us haven't noticed it yet. Most of us are still in freefall. Most of us are looking backward, nostalgic about an age of radio that was better than it is today in some way, shape or form. It isn't, but that's how our brain works.

But the point – the whole point of this speech – and I hope it will encourage and enthuse everyone here, no matter what your role in or relationship to radio might be… it's that Radio Does Not Exist. But that means that we now get to invent it. And we know what it's *supposed* to do. We can use the tools, the techniques and the technologies that we have learned in our naïve adventure of innocence through radio's development and, if you like, descent from the mythic to the ironic… and we can use that experience, the knowledge and the understanding of how radio makes meaning for people.

Do you remember Simon, the theatre director? The point of that story was about what happens when one medium addresses its *successor*. It really concerns the internet and the digital age, and for our purposes today, radio.

We *think* we're listening to radio online when we "tune in" to a stream, or use Last.fm or download a podcast – whether or not it's been made by something you might think of as a radio station, or by people you might think of as broadcasters – but that's not what's happening. We're on the internet and that's different.

Douglas Adams – the guy who wrote The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy - was something of an internet pioneer. And he said that people would come up to him and ask him what was going to happen to their publishing businesses, their creative businesses, their broadcasting businesses, their music businesses – when they hit the internet. And he said it's like a river asking what's going to happen to it when it hits the ocean. It's not going to be a river anymore.

But that ocean is our new mythic space. Just as Simon used the theatre director's tools at his disposal to enter into the world of a new medium with a wealth of experience as a sophisticated media producer – and go on to make television programmes that understood the technology, the opportunities, the cultural context and the art of that medium – we have the opportunity as scholars – if we're not radio producers ourselves - to at least bring to the attention of radio people that simply pointing the internet at their programmes understands neither medium. And it does the content, the audience – and even the advertiser – no favours whatsoever.

To be absolutely clear: radio skills are, I would argue, more relevant than ever *because* we have pushed through the bottom and have ended up back at the top... In a new context, in a new era, with new tools and new audiences – but with techniques, understandings and, most importantly, the experience to make it work. That's it. That's what I have to say.

And woe betide you, Molly Whuppie, if you e'er return again.

Thanks very much. Kia Ora – and welcome.